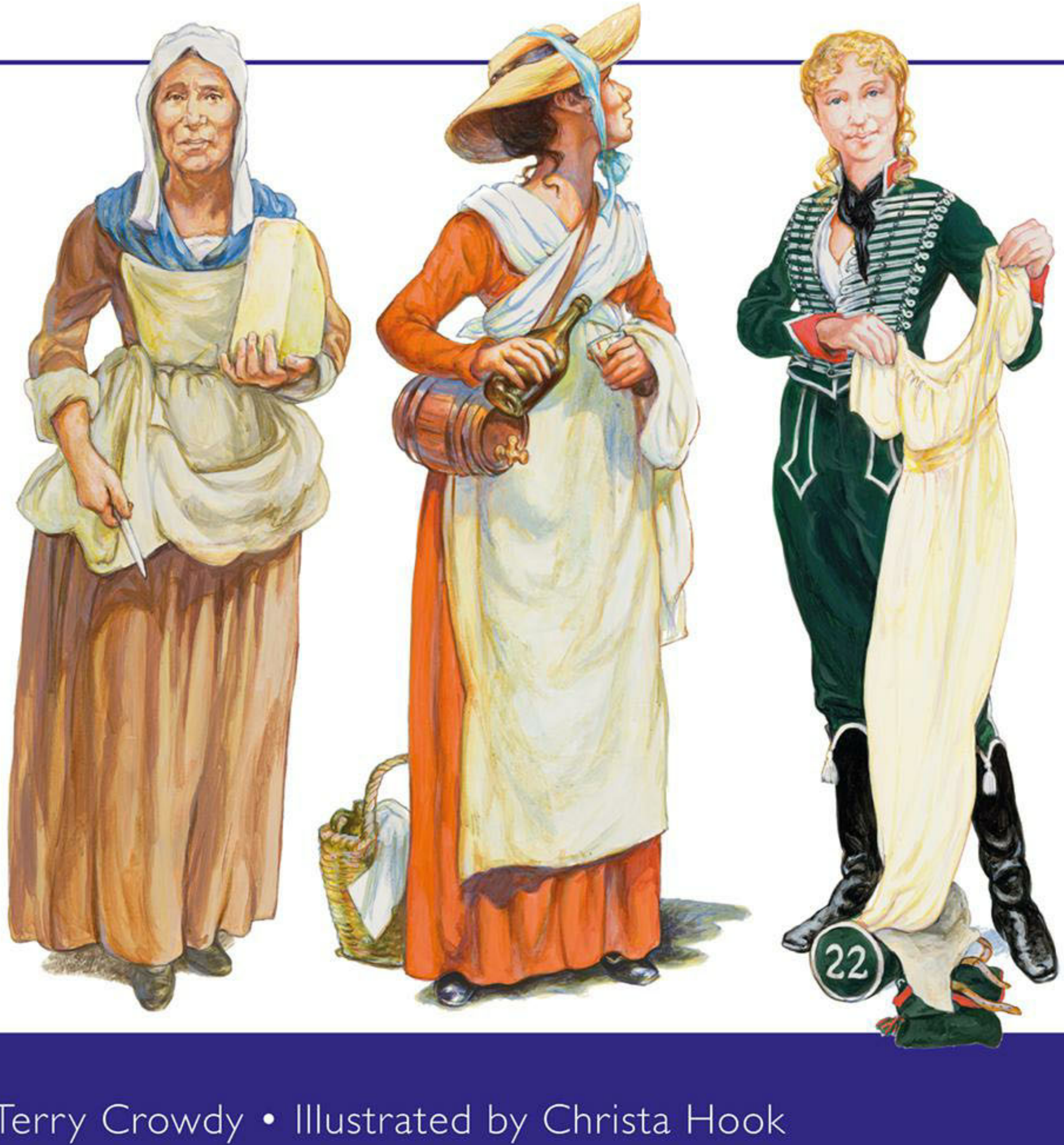
Men-at-Arms

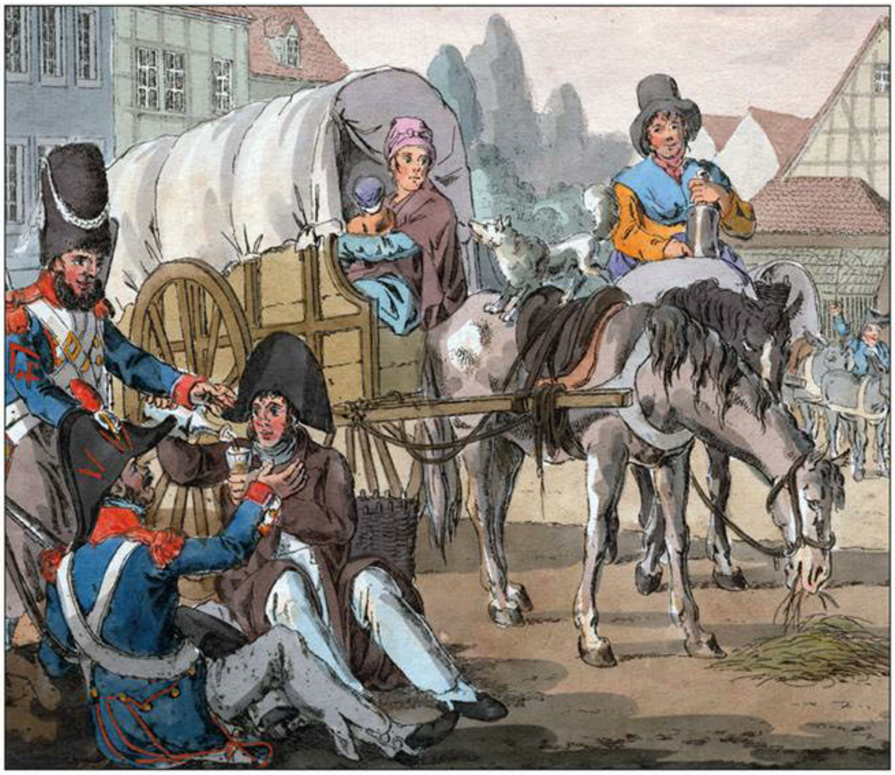
Napoleon's Women Camp Followers



Terry Crowdy • Illustrated by Christa Hook

Men-at-Arms 538

Napoleon's Women
Camp Followers



Terry Crowdy • Illustrated by Christa Hook

Series editors: Martin Windrow & Nick Reynolds

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

- Definitions, and popular status

WOMEN AND THE ARMIES

- Military marriages
- Soldier-sutlers
- Chaos in spring 1793
- Bonaparte’s early campaigns: officers’ indiscipline
- Prostitution
- The Civil Code, 1804

ORGANIZATION

- Decree of 30 April 1793 – identification, and numbers
- Decree of 26 July 1800
- Army of Germany, 1809
- *Grande Armée* , 1812

THE ROLE OF *VIVANDIÈRES* & *CANTINIÈRES*

- Goods and services
- Sutlers’ tents
- Discipline
- Civilian canteens

BLANCHISSEUSES

- In barracks and camp
- On campaign

COSTUME

- **The early 1790s**
- **From Revolution to Directory and Empire**
- **Revolutionary cockades**

THE REGIMENTAL CHILDREN

- **The *ancien régime***
- **Law of 26 July 1800**

THE LEGEND OF MARIE TÊTE-DU-BOIS

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

PLATE COMMENTARIES

NAPOLEON’S WOMEN CAMP FOLLOWERS

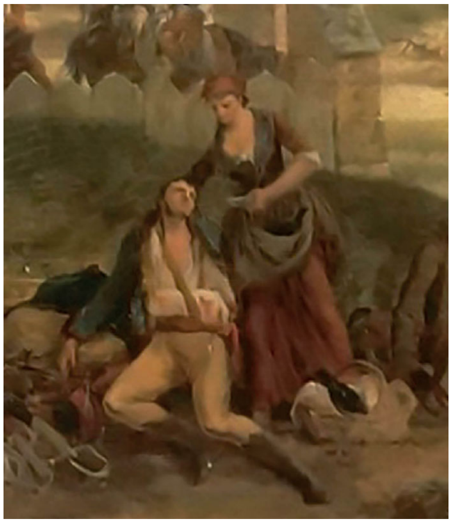
INTRODUCTION

All armies stretching back into antiquity were followed by retinues of non-combatant servants and squires, wives, children, merchants, minstrels, harlots, hawkers and other adventurous itinerants. The subjects of this book are specifically the women authorized to follow France’s armies during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792–1815). Unlike many other camp followers of that period, these Frenchwomen were regulated and officially recognized, and played a highly appreciated part in the army’s daily life.

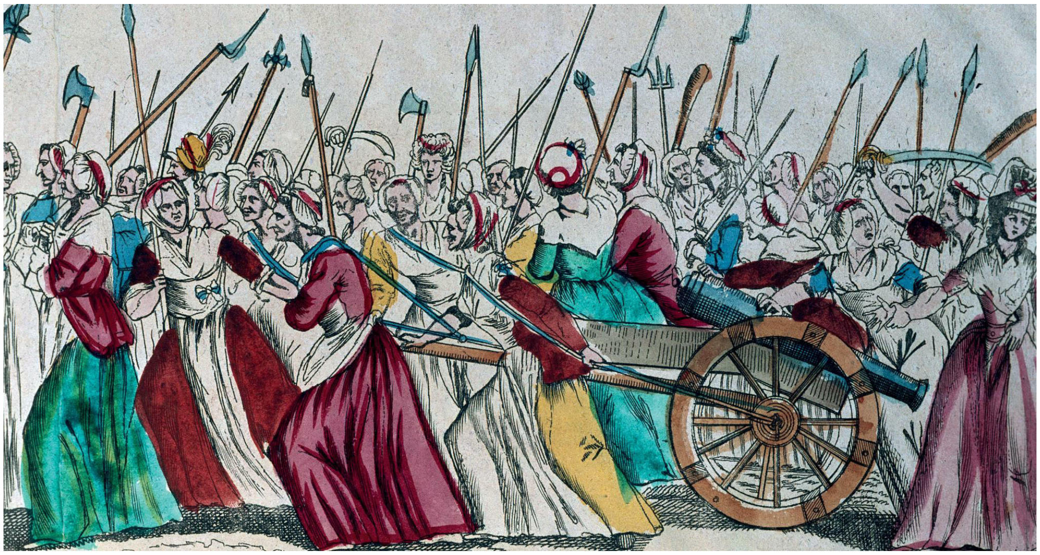
They were not military personnel paid by the state, but the civilian wives of soldiers, working as sutler-women and laundresses. We should also perhaps stress their non-combatant status. Without doubt, women camp followers did sometimes take up weapons in desperation to defend themselves, whether on the frozen uplands east of Smolensk or in Spanish passes. Many could handle a flintlock musket or pistol, and the hardier types probably kept close-protection weapons somewhere about their baggage or person. Equally, while some may have thrown on a spare greatcoat or riding-mantle in the perishing cold, or sported a soldier’s cap during a boozy night of song, it would be a mistake to think of camp followers of this period as uniformed service personnel (see below, ‘Costume’). They were simply civilian women who had either been born into a regiment or who had once fallen in love with a soldier, and who ended up sharing the military life, in good times and in bad.

Definitions, and popular status

Sutler-women were known initially (and always officially) as *vivandières,* but also, increasingly from the mid-1790s, as *cantinières* . The English word closest in meaning to *vivandière* is ‘victualler’ – a word originating in Old French, and ultimately from the Latin *victus* (‘that which sustains life’). *Vivandier* (the male form) is derived from the words *vivres* (‘foodstuffs’), and *viande* (‘fresh meat’). Since the term clearly implies a transactional relationship – a provider of food and drink – it is often translated as ‘sutler’, although in fact that word originally had a very different meaning; it comes to us from the Dutch *zoetelaar* (‘a person who performs menial tasks’). The term *cantinière* derives from *cantine* , a French word which only came into use in the mid-18th century, originally from the Latin *cantina* (‘wine cellar’). Initially meaning a barkeeper in a garrison town, *cantinière* was applied freely to *vivandières* , and the two words became synonymous and interchangeable.



Detail from painting of the battle for the bridge at Arcola in 1796, by Louis Albert Guislain Bacler D'Albe (1761–1824), showing a camp follower tending a wounded hussar. The *vivandière* is wearing a deep red dress with a matching headscarf, and note the apron characteristically tucked up at her hip. (Fine Art Images/ Heritage Images/ Getty Images)

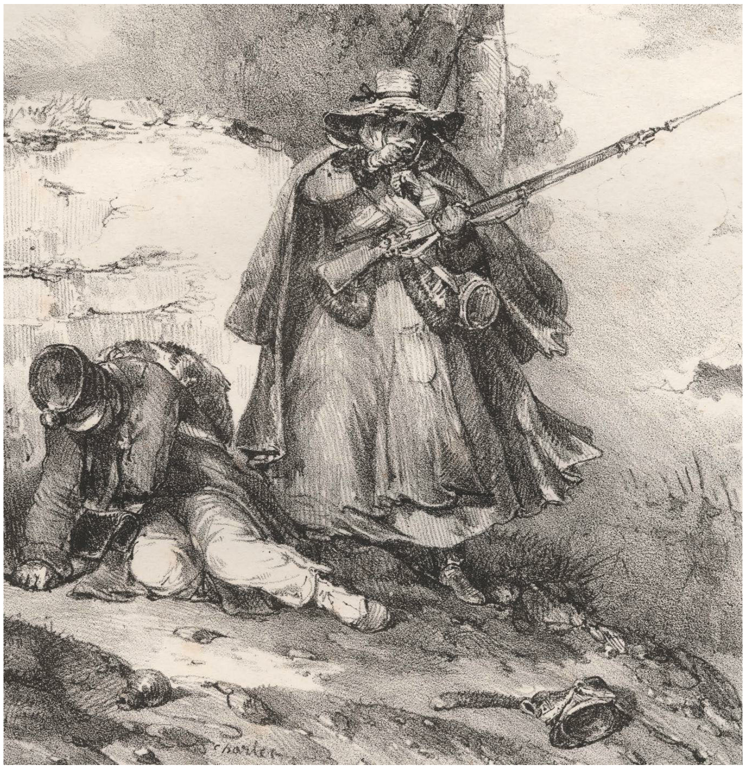


This scene of the march to Versailles on 5 October 1789, which forced the royal family to return to Paris, reminds us that women played a significant part in the Revolution. Thereafter, however, they were officially permitted neither to pursue political activities nor to bear arms. (API/Gamma-Rapho via Gettu Images)

These *vivandières* or *cantinières* have an iconic status in the annals of Napoleon's *Grande Armée* – plucky, stoical women who braved shot and shell to sustain the soldiers with tots of brandy, as they fought and marched their way to glory. As the great soldier–memoirist Elzéar Blaze said of them:

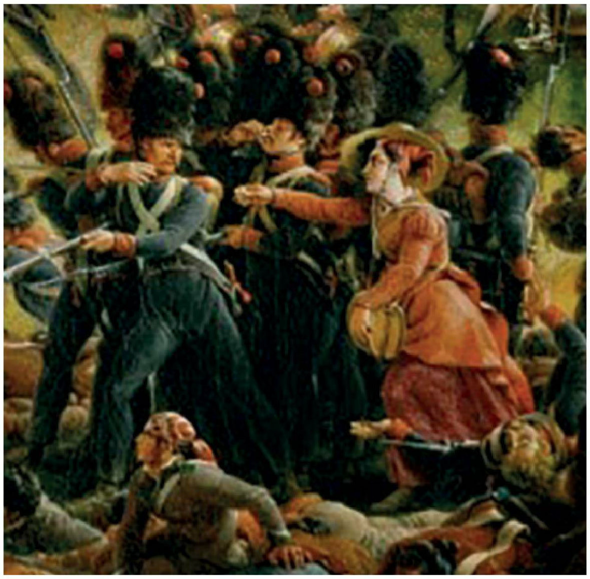
> The *cantinières* rendered great services to the army, while making their fortune... These women, endowed with an unusual energy, were tireless; braving the cold, the heat, the rain and the snow like old grenadiers… People who have never lacked the essential things in life cannot imagine the importance of a bottle of wine or a glass of brandy at certain moments. A well-trained *cantinière* always had a small reserve for the officers; she kept it for the big occasions, which doubled – tripled – the importance of the service. What happiness indeed, when you are on ploughed land, wet to the bone, and you think you are going to bed without supper, to meet, near a wonderful fire, a slice of

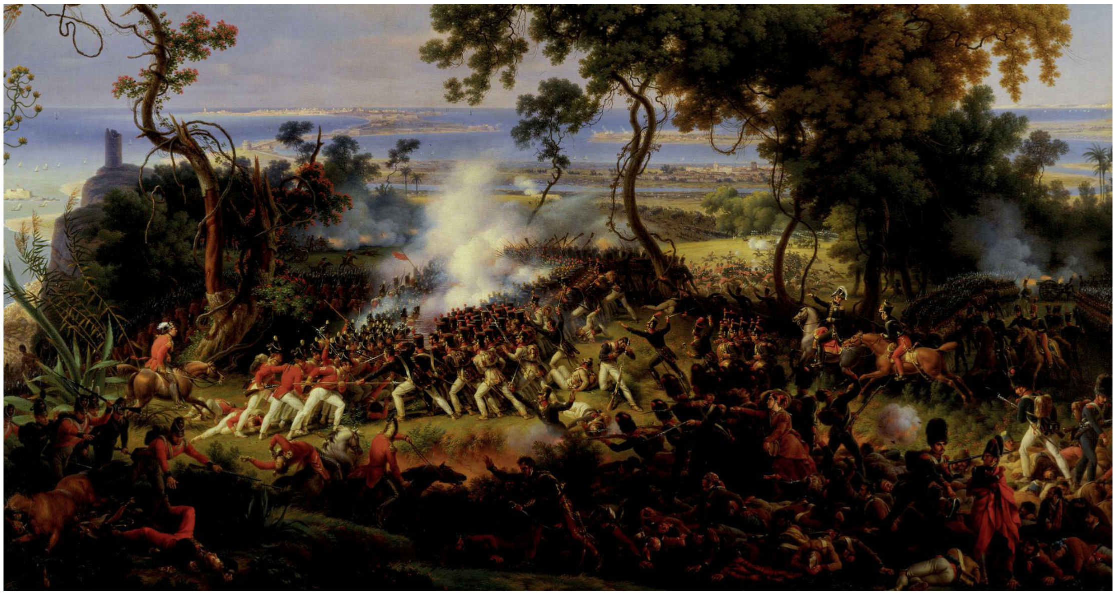
ham or a bowl of mulled wine – or both! It was expensive sometimes, but money is only good for getting what you need. The moment one cannot exchange its representative value for bread, gold is worth no more than iron.



Lithograph of an illustration by Charlet entitled ‘ *Oh, les gueux!’* (‘Oh, the rogues!’), showing a *cantinière* priming a musket taken from a wounded soldier. It is clear that camp women did sometimes take up arms in extreme situations. (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection)

On the day of battle, the camp followers would generally congregate in the rear and await the outcome. However, there are many stories of sutler-women braving enemy fire, remaining with their regiments in the battle-line and serving brandy to soldiers to stiffen their resolve in combat. Many would say ‘Pay me tomorrow’, knowing that many of the men would die. In the front line these women were as vulnerable to shot and shell as any soldier in the ranks, and it is this bravery which earned the *vivandières* their lasting renown.





Details from the painting by Louis-François Lejeune (1775–1848) depicting the battle of Chiclana (Barossa) in southern Spain, 5 March 1811. In his memoirs Lejeune described the heroism of *vivandière* Catherine Baland, who distributed brandy to soldiers in the firing line, telling them that they could 'pay her tomorrow' (*see* **Plate F1**). (akg-images/Erich Lessing)

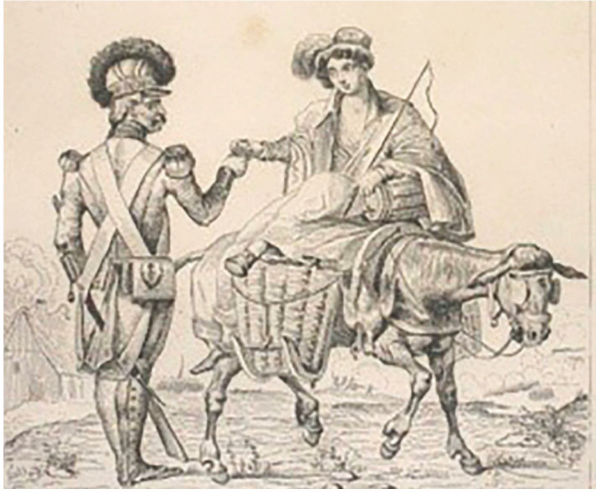
It is important to give this subject some social context, since the rights and expectations of women in late 18th-century France differed enormously from our own experience. While there was nothing new in the concept of women following an army on campaign, what was novel is the way that from 1793 Frenchwomen became officially licensed to work as sutlers, a right previously granted only to men.

WOMEN AND THE ARMIES

Military marriages

Almost as longstanding as the presence of women with armies was a centuries-old quandary about whether common soldiers should be permitted to marry and have families. Many believed that this would prove too great a distraction for fighting men, particularly when family members were present with the army and thus potentially at mortal risk. In the last years of the French *ancien régime* , the situation was as follows.

All soldiers had to gain the permission of their unit commanders to marry. Officers were naturally expected to maintain their noble bloodlines and father future officers; but officers (or their parents) usually had sufficient means to support a family while away on active service, so their wives were not a burden on the state. The provisional *Service Intérieur* or 'police' regulations of 1 July 1788 confirmed that officers wishing to marry had to apply for their colonel's permission, such decisions ultimately resting with the king. This requirement ensured that officers married 'well', and enjoyed a matrimonial status befitting their rank.



An 1830s depiction of a *cantinière* in the early 1790s, riding side-saddle. The donkey's harness allows large basket-panniers to be carried at the same time as a rider. (Martin Lancaster)

Common soldiers, on the other hand, were generally seen as the dregs of society whose absence from the pool of procreating adults was of no great national concern. There were plenty of vagabonds and strays to fill the ranks, and foreign mercenaries were always on tap. Should a common soldier wish to marry, he first had to ask his captain's permission. The request would be put to the colonel, ultimate arbiter of all things regimental, and again there were constraints. At this time soldiers were very poorly paid, and in peacetime often had to take work in the civilian sector to supplement their wages. The majority of soldiers therefore had no means of supporting a family unless the wife could bring additional income, and the last thing the army wanted was a retinue of starving wretches begging at the gate. A common soldier wishing to marry had to demonstrate that the union would improve his financial standing, or that the woman at least possessed a trade useful to the regiment, such as *blanchisseuse* (laundress) – or *couturière* (seamstress), because in this period a regiment made up its own uniforms at the depot.

Soldier-sutlers

There was another means of turning marriage to profit. Some soldiers – usually long-serving non-commissioned officers – were granted the right to serve as sutlers to their battalions. This was an extremely lucrative 'perk' of military service under the *ancien régime* . The soldier-sutler (*vivandier*) would sell to the men of his battalion alcohol, more varied food than the rations provided, hair powder, and sundry other items not provided by the Royal Treasury.

Of course, the sutler also had his military duties to attend to, including stints as the duty NCO and so on. These limited his ability to leave the barracks to go shopping for provisions and to service his clients on a daily basis. To fully exploit the potential of this lucrative trade, the sutlers married and put their wives to work, leaving much of the buying and selling to them. Unlike laundresses, before 1793 the wives of sutlers had no official status; even well into the Napoleonic period, sutlers were often referred to only in the masculine form *vivandier* in official documents. Interestingly, the provisional 'police' regulations of July 1788 did not fix the precise number of wives who might be present, instead leaving it to the 'prudence' of regimental commanders to find a happy balance. In a typical French infantry regiment, eight seems to have been the norm – four per battalion, half of whom were laundresses.

Chaos in spring 1793

The controls on soldiers marrying remained in place until 8 March 1793, when the National Convention (the Revolutionary government) announced that soldiers were free to marry without the permission of their chiefs. This liberal reform had a profound effect: it resulted in absolute chaos. On 17 March, LtGen Rostaing, Inspector of Artillery at Auxonne, wrote that a battalion commander in the 2nd Artillery Regt had reported that there were now more than 20 married NCOs or soldiers in each company. Based on this, Rostaing estimated that there were nearly 400 wives present (some of whom, he noted with a raised eyebrow, had already had two children before being married).

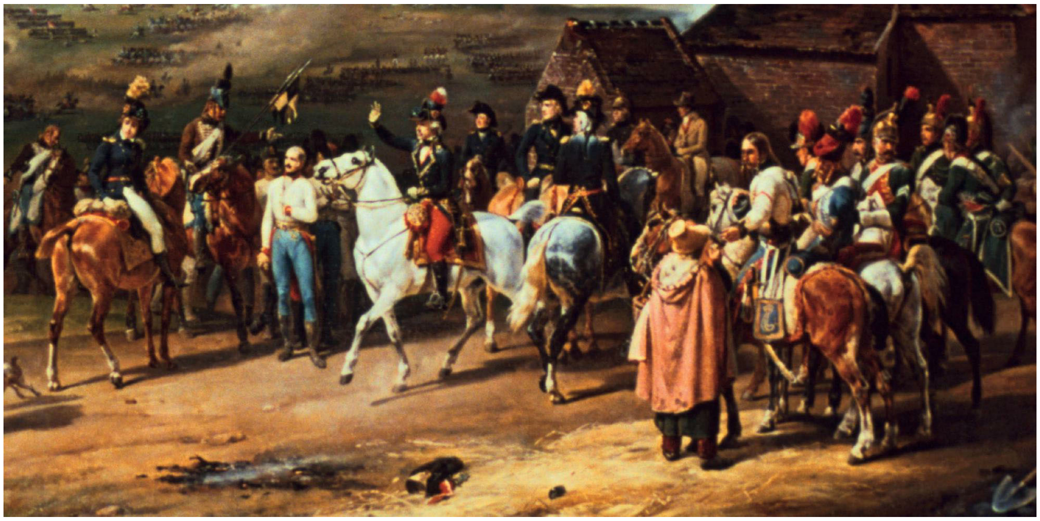
A few days later, on 22 March, the politician Jean-François Delacroix wrote to the government complaining about the number of women now present with the army in Belgium:

> The National Convention has allowed soldiers to marry without the consent of their chiefs; this law has a flaw that needs urgent reform. One must fix the number of women who can follow the army; they are so numerous that they embarrass the march of the troops, consume a great deal, and occupy a great number of wagons intended exclusively for the transport of baggage and provisions of the army. … Hurry to find a cure, and apply it.

These were not the only complaints from the armies. On 16 April 1793, Lazare Carnot (the future Minister of War, famed as 'the organizer of victory') reported the following from Dunkirk:

> A terrible scourge destroys our armies: it is the herd of women and girls who are following them. It must be reckoned there are as many of them as there are soldiers. The barracks and cantonments are engorged. The breakdown of morals is at its height. They irritate the troops and destroy, by the diseases which they bring there, ten times more people than the enemy's iron. We do not doubt that this is the main cause of the weakening of courage... (At Douai), when the garrison was reduced to 350 men, there

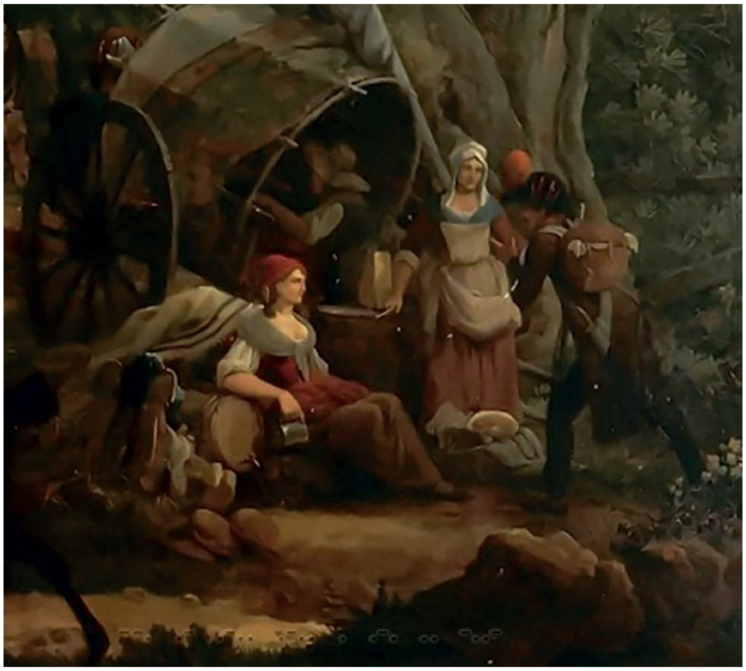
were nearly 3,000 women in the barracks, to the point that there was no room for the new units which arrived from the army of Dumouriez...



Detail from an 1821 painting of the battle of Jemappes on 6 November 1792, after Horace Vernet (1789–1863), which is now exhibited in the National Gallery, London. In the suite of Gen Charles Dumouriez (centre) we can see one of the Fernig sisters, both of whom served as his ADCs. A *vivandière* (right) is serving a drink to a mounted hussar; *see* **Plates A2** & **A3** for details of these two figures. (Art Media/Print Collector/Getty Images)

Carnot pleaded for a 'law of the greatest severity' to empower him and other government representatives to tackle this issue.

More complaints followed almost daily. On 27 April the impact of women camp followers in Lille was highlighted in a letter to the Minister of War, Jean-Baptiste Bouchotte: 'The large number of women who follow the armies is frightening; there are so many mouths infinitely costly to the Republic, especially at a moment when it is only with difficulty and with a lot of money that we manage to supply the armies...' Two days later, Pierre Gadolle wrote from Dunkirk to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Le Brun: 'Here I note the battalions of volunteers are followed by 20 or 22 carts when they are moving, and that these carts are so full of women, cradles and children, that there is no more room for the sick or the equipment of the soldiers. Elsewhere I learn that 80 gendarmes were followed by 50 or 60 women, many of whom had morals discordant with the innocent villagers with whom they lived...'



Another detail from Bacler-d'Albe's painting of the battle of Arcola; although hard to make out, this is one of the best depictions of women camp followers in the 1790s. Three women have set up a canteen; their costume is early, with the waistline on their hips. Under magnification, the standing figure (right – see reconstruction as **Plate C1**) holds a small knife; she has cured hams at her feet, and a large wedge of hard cheese on a barrel. The seated *vivandière* (left) has a tankard, and the one rummaging in the cart wears a wide-brimmed straw hat with a ribbon tied under her chin. Note the hooped canvas tilt on the two-wheeled cart. (Fine Art Images/ Heritage Images/Getty Images)

This storm of complaint quickly resulted in the decree of 30 April 1793, in which the National Convention instructed their generals to dismiss all unnecessary women from the camps and cantonments of the French armies. Anyone not employed in laundry or the selling of provisions was to be provided with travelling expenses and sent home. While the decree was explicit in expelling unnecessary women, it also marked a fundamental change in the relationship between the army and sutler-women. For the first time the women who were considered necessary gained recognition in their own right. They were no longer simply the wives of soldiers enjoying an age-old privilege, but would be officially sanctioned by the regimental colonel, and given a certificate and a distinguishing mark authorizing them to carry on their trade. This gave the *vivandières* and *cantinières* a status different from anything that had gone before.

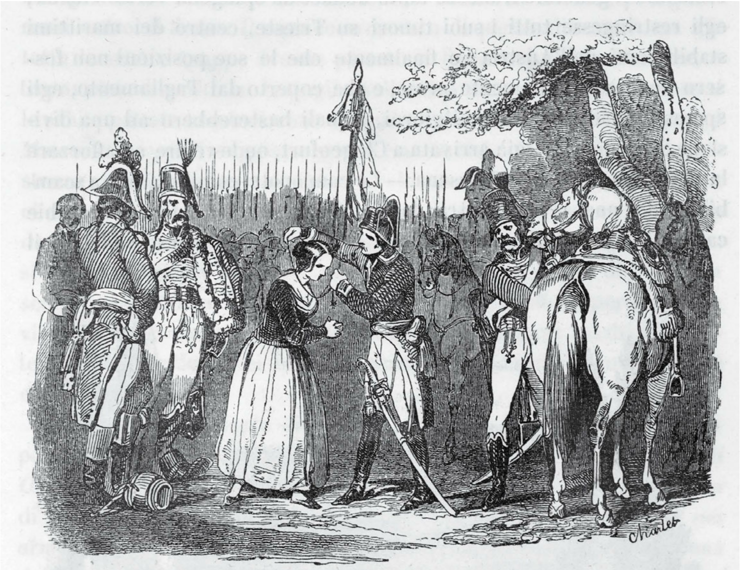
Thereafter, we read numerous examples of the punishments inflicted on women who ignored the rules about following France's armies. These were intended to humiliate and deter in equal measure: women found guilty of being present without authorization had their faces blackened with pitch. Of course, many women ignored the rules and the risks, and continued to follow their menfolk in an unofficial capacity.

This decree also dismissed from the army those women who were actually serving as soldiers. It is unclear how many women were under arms at that moment, but the fact that the National Convention legislated against the practice suggests that there must have been some. General Charles Dumouriez (who defected to the Austrians in April 1793, after a botched coup) was accused of having a headquarters resembling a Vizier's harem. Among the *chantreuses* and mistresses present, Dumouriez employed the Fernig sisters as his aides-de-camp; both were distinguished in battle, and one of them had a horse shot beneath her (see **Plate A2**). In comparison to the millions of young men called to the colours between 1792 and 1815, the numbers of women soldiers were negligible. Although there was many a patriotic revolutionary *citoyeness* , the government remained socially conservative with regard to the role of women in both politics and conflict. Even at moments of great crisis, such as when the French government implemented the first *levée en masse* (23 August 1793) calling up the French people to defend the fatherland from invasion, women were not called to arms. Their role was described in traditional and passive terms: to make clothes and tents, and to assist in the hospitals.

Bonaparte's early campaigns: officers' indiscipline

Four years later, we still find large numbers of unauthorized women following the army. General Napoleon Bonaparte, advancing through Italy and poised to strike at Austria through the Alps, reminded his half-brigades on 28 March 1797 that they were only permitted the number of sutler-women set out in the field service regulations, and that sutlers should only have the regulation number of horses. He wrote that any sutlers with more horses would be expelled from the army and have their horses confiscated. He also cracked down on the number of laundresses with the army. A list of those present was to be sent by the chief of each corps to the chief of staff, who would choose which of them to authorize ('corps' used in this context means a distinct regiment, not an Army Corps formation). Those allowed to remain were required to wear a medallion marking their status; any others would receive 'public correction', and be expelled at least two days' march away from the army.

However, when Napoleon issued this order he had recently installed his own wife in an estate outside Milan, after spending much of the previous year trying to cajole Josephine out of Paris to join him in Italy. It appears that he was not the only newly-wed desperate to spend time with his wife. His order of 28 March was largely ignored, and he had to issue a subsequent daily order on 5 April 1797:



1844 illustration by Charlet, depicting a famous episode during the first Italian campaign of 1796–97. General Bonaparte rewards a *vivandière* of the 51st Half-Brigade, Marie Dauranne, who rescued a soldier from drowning in the Piave river, with a gold medallion inscribed 'First *Cantinière* of the Army'. (DeAgostini/Getty Images)

> The commander-in-chief sees with the greatest dissatisfaction that, in spite of his order of [28 March], women continue to follow the army. He sees that it is above all the officers who prolong this abuse by allowing theirs to follow, thus setting [a bad] example to the soldiers. As a result, he warns all army officers to take, within five days, all measures to send their wives to the rear. After this period, those whose wives are

> found [with] the army will be provisionally dismissed, and the commander-in-chief will report this at once to the Minister of War.

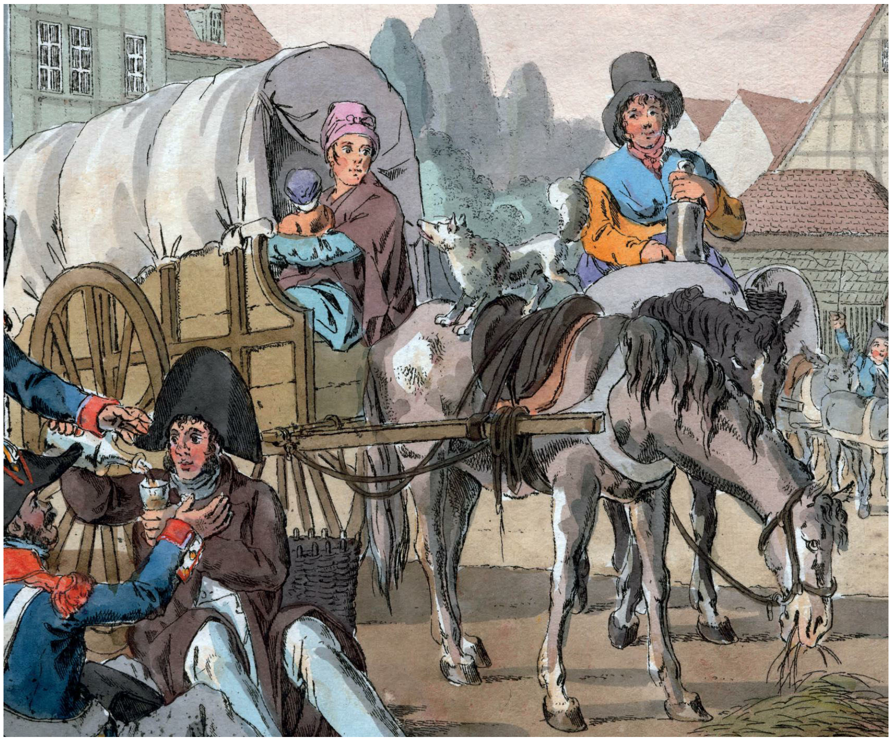
Despite the government’s insistence, the wives and lovers of generals and other officers continued to follow the army throughout our period. For example, while around 300 official camp followers accompanied the expedition to Egypt in 1798, some officers’ wives (who were forbidden to do the same) were smuggled aboard ship disguised as men. Thus begins the story of ‘Cleopatra’, a cavalry lieutenant’s wife who became the mistress of both Napoleon and his successor, Gen Jean-Baptiste Kléber (see **Plate C3**).

Memoirs of the period give ample examples of wives and mistresses following their husbands. Perhaps the most famous case was the mistress of Marshal Masséna, Henriette Leberton, who dressed as a cavalry officer and was nominally an aide-de-camp on the marshal’s staff. The entertaining memoirs of Baron Marbot claim that Masséna only accepted command of the French army in Portugal on condition that Napoleon allowed him to take her with him. There were numerous occasions when the presence of this young lady distracted Masséna at crucial moments. It is even said that he once halted the march of an Army Corps and sent a squadron of hussars to search for a pet parakeet which she had mislaid. The soldiers apparently nicknamed her ‘ *la Poule à Masséna* ’ on account of her hen-like shrieks when exposed to shellfire.

Prostitution

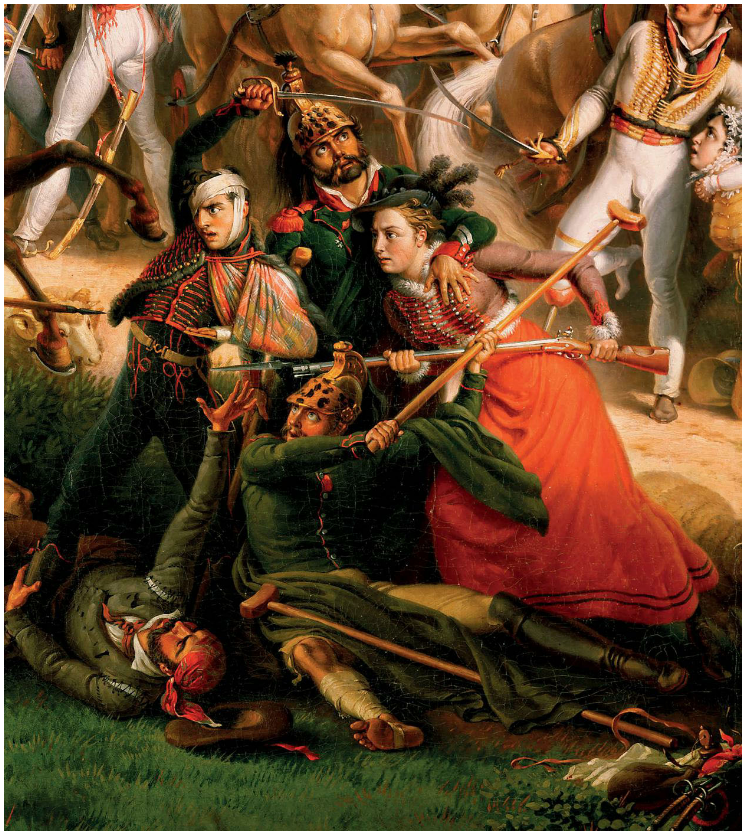
Another unauthorized class of camp followers were euphemistically known as ‘public women’, or ‘ *filles de joie* ’ (‘girls of pleasure’). The relationship between soldier and prostitute is, of course, a thread that runs throughout military history.

Writing of the medieval period, the military encyclopaedist Etienne-Alexandre Bardin cites the arrival in Paris in 1465 of a company of Burgundian mounted archers, followed by eight *filles de joie* and their own confessor. A century later, we find laws and regulations suppressing such practices. An ordinance of 10 December 1570 declared that soldiers found in camp with a *fille de joie* would be dismissed, and the woman stripped naked and flogged. A hundred years later still, Louis XIV introduced a succession of controls, including a 1687 edict that prostitutes were not to approach within two leagues (approx. 8km/5 miles) of Versailles, or to be in the company of soldiers. Punishments were brutal, including mutilation – the cutting off of nose and ears.



One of the excellent studies by Christian Heinrich Gottfried Geissler (1770–1844) of the French army in Germany. This scene from Leipzig in 1808 shows a *cantinière* with a child riding her two-wheeled cart; she wears a pink bonnet, light blue dress and brown shawl. A second woman, wearing a top hat, an ochre dress and a bright blue *fichu* , is riding side-saddle, and holding an earthenware jug. In the right background the uncropped print shows a second wagon, with a team of three mules. (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection)

Even in the supposed Age of Reason in the mid-18th century, *filles de mauvaise vie* ('girls of poor morals') found in garrisons might be exposed in an iron cage, forced astride a *cheval de bois* ('wooden horse'), beaten with ramrods, have their foreheads 'marked' (branded) with symbols such as the royal *fleur-de-lys,* or at the very least have their faces blackened with pitch or other substances difficult to remove. This raises the question of why such brutal methods were adopted to control such natural human urges, particularly among men who were positively discouraged from taking a wife.

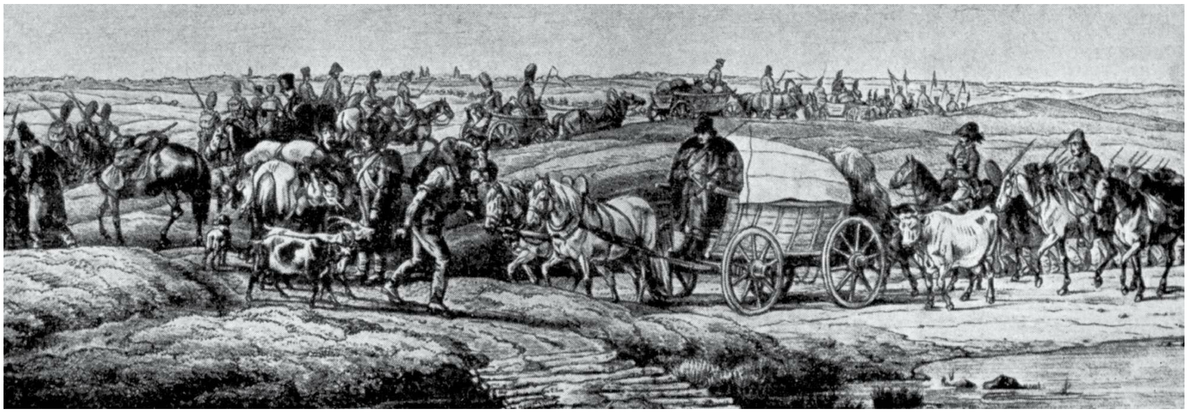


Despite numerous orders and laws, wives often followed their husbands on campaign, taking great risks in doing so. The wife of a dragoon is depicted in this detail from the 1819 painting entitled ‘ *Attaque du grand convoi dans les défilés de Salinas en Biscaye, 25 May 1812* ’ by Louis-François Lejeune, the officer-artist of the Peninsular War. Her jacket appears to be of civilian manufacture, but with military embellishments. (akg-images/Erich Lessing)

The explanation lies partly in the ever-increasing professionalism of state armies, and the need to prevent disorders sparked off by bawdy goings-on in camp and barrack-room. In his study of *Women, Armies, and Warfare in Early Modern Europe* , John A. Lynn explains the enforcement of a stricter moral code as also partly a response to the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation of the 16th century, but there is a simpler and less high-minded explanation: the disastrous impact of sexually-transmitted diseases.

We have already quoted Carnot’s complaint that the diseases carried by women caused ten times the casualties suffered from enemy action. This was in the days before even the basic mechanisms of most infections were properly understood. Until the later 19th century many, and particularly malarial infections, were attributed to ‘miasmas’ – mysterious and foul ‘airs’. With poor latrine discipline and water hygiene routinely making dysentery, cholera and enteric fever the scourges of armies in the field, the last thing a general needed was for his troops to be struck down with other debilitating illnesses that were known to spread through contact with prostitutes.

After the French Revolution this culture of prohibition relaxed somewhat, and by 1800 Paris alone was believed to have about 30,000 prostitutes (perhaps as many as one tenth of the adult female population). While he admitted that he himself had visited one in Paris’s Palais Royal district in 1787, Napoleon pragmatically introduced regulations to limit the spread of venereal disease. A new epidemic of syphilis saw prostitutes required to undergo regular health checks from 1802. To facilitate these, from 1804 official brothels known as *maisons de tolérance* or *maisons closes* became increasingly established. Thus soldiers became used to visiting brothels, which could be controlled carefully, rather than having freelance prostitutes resident in their camps.



This illustration by Albrecht Adam (1786–1862) of the supply train in Russia, 1812, was later worked into the painting 'Soldiers on the road to Lianvawitschi' . This version shows (centre) a male sutler wearing a top hat, driving a wagon with his wife sheltering in the back. A second woman in a top hat rides behind, with two more to the left of the wagon, further up the column. A professional artist, Adam accompanied IV Corps under Gen Eugène de Beauharnais in 1812; *see* also **Plate G1** . (INTERFOTO/TopFoto)

The Civil Code, 1804

In parallel, Napoleon's introduction of the Civil Code in 1804 saw the rules for marriage become fixed in law. With their parent's or guardian's permission, men could marry at 18, women at 15 years. The duties of the married couple were described in traditional terms: 'The husband owes protection to his wife, the wife obedience to her husband.' She was obliged to live with him, and follow him. The man was legally the head of the household (a right enshrined in French law until 1970); in the context of camp followers, he was expected to discipline his wife, so as to help prevent disorders within the regiment. A widow could not re-marry until ten months after her husband's death, presumably to avoid any disputes over parentage.

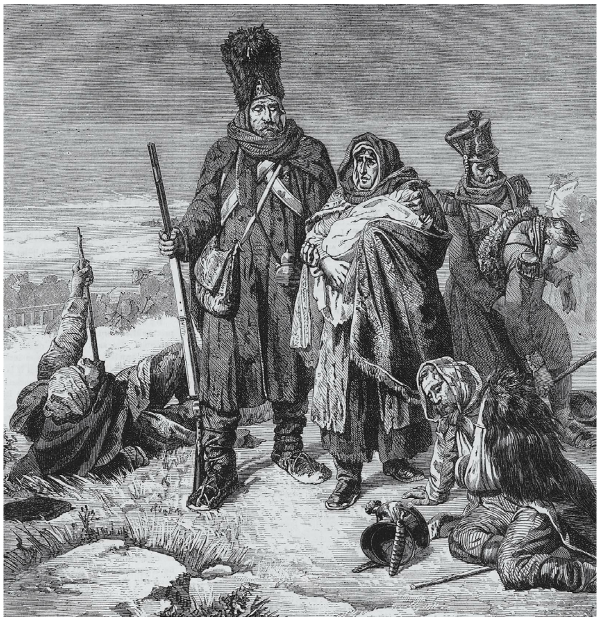
As emperor, Napoleon was as socially conservative as his pre-Revolutionary predecessors. He created a new imperial nobility with court etiquette to match, and the rules on marriage for soldiers were confirmed in an imperial decree of 16 June 1808. All officers had to obtain the written permission of the Minister of War before marriage, on pain of being cashiered and losing their rights and pension. Non-commissioned officers and soldiers first had to obtain the permission of the regimental council of administration (a committee responsible for the internal management of each unit). However, it seems doubtful that soldiers always bothered with the formalities of a civil wedding, particularly on campaign. When a husband was killed, the widow had a pragmatic and immediate need for a new one, both to maintain her ties with her regiment and also to physically protect her from theft and molestation. We therefore learn of unofficial unions between soldiers and camp followers, perhaps marked by simple folk rites or merely by the exchange of toasts. These arrangements may have suited some, but without the proof of a formal marriage certificate the woman had no legal right to make claim on her husband's pension.

ORGANIZATION

Decree of 30 April 1793 – identification, and numbers

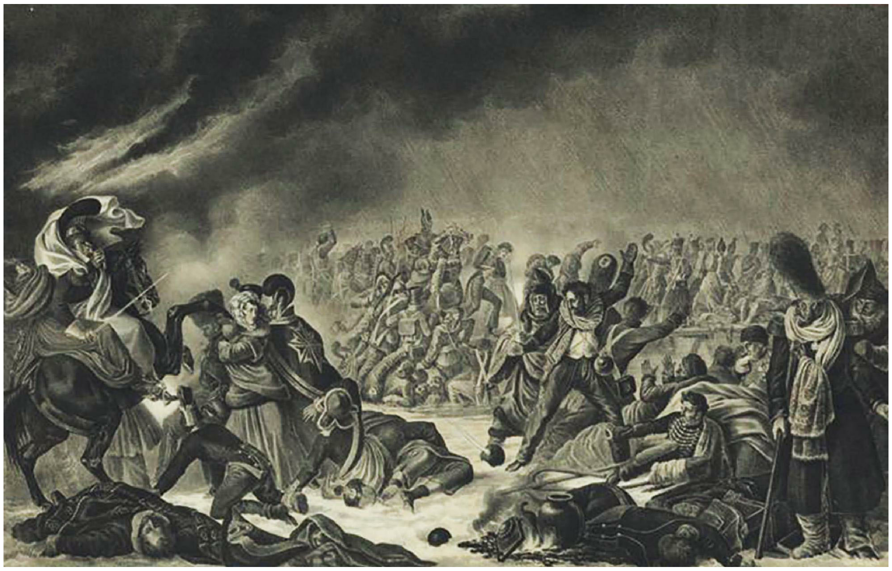
The first regulations controlling sutlers in the French army date from as early as the latter part of the 16th century. Successive ordinances set out the type and number of vehicles provided for sutlers, and where their tents should be pitched in camp. There were rules on the order of march, forbidding sutlers from travelling in front of the artillery, and requiring them to enter towns 100 paces behind their regiment. The National Convention's decree of 30 April 1793, instructing generals to dismiss all unnecessary women from the army, also set out how many women could be given official permission to follow it. Two articles from this law are worth repeating in full:

> III. There will be four laundresses per battalion: they will be authorized to do this service by a letter from the chief of the corps, certified by the commissary of war. They will bear a distinguishing mark...
> VII. The divisional generals will deliver to the *vivandières* they think absolutely necessary for the needs of their divisions, a distinguishing mark; those who are not provided with this mark will be dismissed.



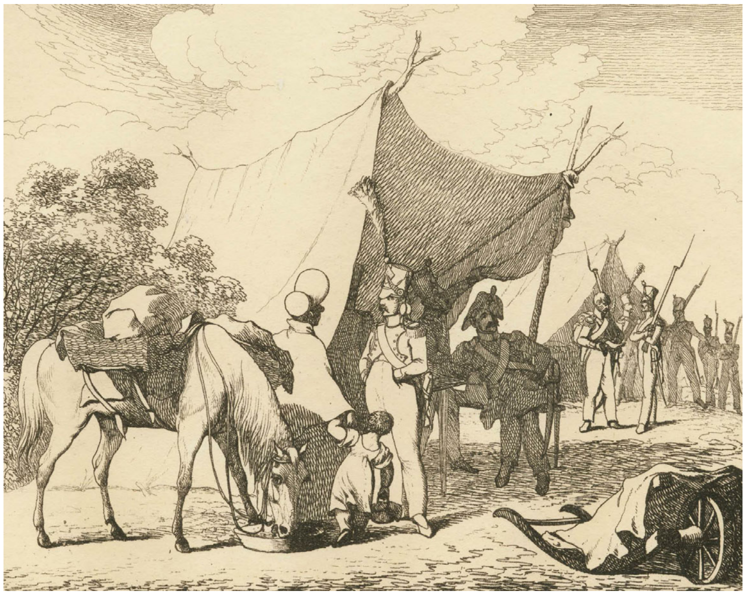
An 1865 impression of the 1812 retreat from Moscow, by Joseph Louis Hippolyte Bellangé (1800–66). Numbers of women undoubtedly gave birth during the campaign; when the army retreated in winter conditions they were left in the desperate situation of trying to care for an infant, with food increasingly short and few pack animals or wagons remaining for transport. (DeAgostini/Getty Images)

This 'distinguishing mark' took the form of a small round or oval medallion in brass or white metal, usually with a loop at the top for a cord or chain. The whole piece was approximately an inch-and-a-half in size (40–45 mm). A surviving example displays the following capitalized text: 'FEMME DE TROUPE AUTORISÉE PAR LA LOI DU 30 AVRIL 1793'. The reverse simply states: 'République Française'. This 'woman of the troop' would also have held a 'patent' in the form of a certificate with her name, sometimes a description of distinguishing features, and the unit to which she was attached. Other medallions are stamped with the role (*vivandière* or *blanchisseuse*), some with a number (presumably linked to the patent certificate), and some with the name of the relevant army.



An eyewitness to the 1812 invasion of Russia was Christian Wilhelm von Faber du Faur (1780–1857), an officer in the army of the Kingdom of Württemberg. In this scene of the crossing of the Berezina, 28 November 1812, he shows (left) a woman camp follower with a child, staring down at a shell which has just landed among the group waiting to cross the river. She wears a chequered headscarf, a blue gown, and a short-sleeved, fur-lined red pelisse; a metal kettle can be seen by her right hip. (Slavic & East European Collections, The New York Public Library)

Note (in the articles quoted above) that although the number of laundresses was set by the law of 30 April 1793, the number of *vivandières* was not; it was left to individual generals to decide how many were ‘absolutely necessary’. In deciding this the more diligent among them may have looked for guidance in the recently published *Provisional Regulation on the Service of the Infantry on Campaign* (5 April 1792). This stated that each regiment was allowed one sutler with a four-wheeled cart drawn by four horses. Other sutlers were only permitted to use ‘bat’ or pack horses, and there was a limit of four per battalion, including the horses of the laundresses. If the 1793 law allowed four laundresses per battalion, there was no further allowance in the field service regulations for sutler carts or pack animals to be added. We must therefore conclude that the Provisional Regulation was a product of pre-war thinking, of which some details were quickly rendered obsolete by the needs of active campaigning. In fact, when the decree of 30 April was actually enacted in the Army of the North on 29 June 1793, the number of women serving in the capacity of laundresses and *vivandières* was set at six each for battalions of nine companies, and four each for regiments of cavalry.



French infantry in camp, 1813, by Aleksander Zauerveid (1783–1844). A woman and child are depicted beside a horse laden with supplies, which suggests that she is a *vivandière* . Note the extended front brim of her bonnet (see **Plate H1**). The rudimentary tent is raised on poles cut in the field. (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection)

Until the end of the 1790s the number of *vivandières* allowed in fact remained open to interpretation, with generals and colonels enjoying great latitude. As an example, we have the daily orders issued by Col de France of the 12e Chasseurs à Cheval. An order of 23 April 1800 stated that 'conforming to laws and military regulations' (unfortunately we are not told which ones), each squadron was permitted one *cantinière* (note the use of the non-regulation term) and one laundress. In a four-squadron regiment, this meant eight women were permitted. Furthermore, Col de France adds a new stipulation – that these women were not to be wives of non-commissioned officers. One can imagine the abuses which might arise, with soldiers being directed to purchase goods from the wife of their direct superior. However, it was not until as late as 10 September 1839 that NCOs were officially prohibited from being sutlers, on the grounds (as Bardin put it) that there was an inherent disciplinary flaw in having sergeants serving drinks to their soldiers.

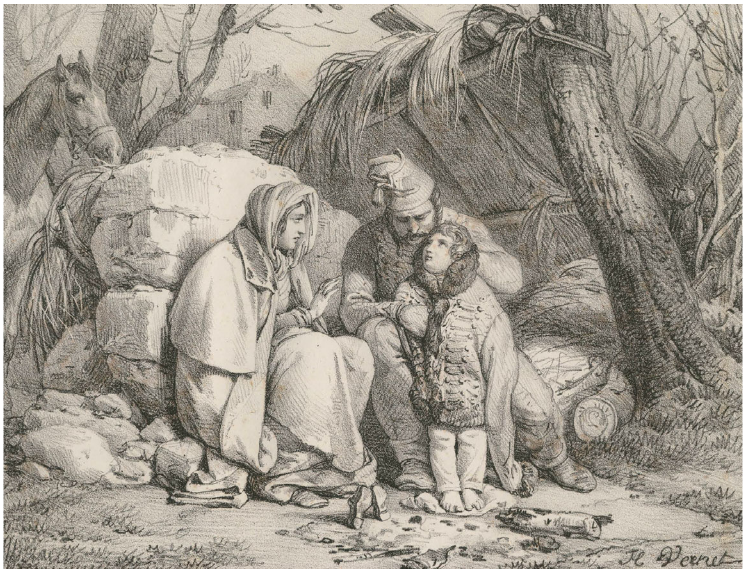
Decree of 26 July 1800

After Marengo (June 1800), the government attempted to clarify the situation with the *Decree concerning Children of the Troop and Women following the Army* (7 Thermidor, Year VIII/ 26 July 1800). This Consular decree confirmed the provisions already made in the law of 30 April 1793: that no women could be attached to a unit unless they were employed in laundering or in the sale of food and drink. Under no circumstances, it said, were there to be more than four women per battalion and two per squadron. The number of sutlers and laundresses at the headquarters of the army and the headquarters of the divisions was not to exceed that of the units which composed the formation. Each woman would receive a document authorizing her presence.

Preference was given to those women who were married to currently serving soldiers or NCOs, who were recognized as being the most active, and whose conduct and morals were the most regular. As with the 1793 law, any woman not admitted as an official laundress or sutler would be given travelling expenses to go home, and was forbidden from approaching within 4 leagues of the army (approx. 16km/10 miles). Any widows of soldiers who had lost their husbands as a result of war, and who were not retained as sutlers or laundresses, were also sent home, with a reminder to take advantage of the relief granted to them under the provisions for military pensions in the law of 14 Fructidor, Year VI (31 August 1798).

Army of Germany, 1809

In 1809 the Provisional Regulation of 1792 was reviewed and reissued for the French Army of Germany. Army headquarters would have a *vivandière* with a four-wheeled cart (*chariot*) with four horses, and two laundresses each with a pack horse. The headquarters of each Army Corps would have a *vivandière* with a four-wheeled cart drawn by three horses, and a laundress with a pack horse. Each infantry regiment would have a *vivandière* with a four-wheeled cart drawn by four horses for the regimental staff, and each battalion two *vivandières* and two laundresses, each with a pack horse. The regiments of cavalry and light artillery would each have a *vivandière* attached to the staff with a carriage (*voiture*) drawn by three horses. There would be one *vivandière* and one laundress per squadron, each with a pack horse. Each battalion of foot artillery, sappers, miners, artillery train and baggage train would have a *vivandière* with a three-horse carriage, and two laundresses each with a pack horse.



An 1818 illustration after Horace Vernet, depicting a hussar bivouacking with his wife and child; there is no way of telling if the woman has any official status. The child is obviously soaked through; his father has wrapped him in his *pelisse* , and his shoes are propped up to dry by the ashes of a fire. The mother wears an apron over her skirt, and what appears to be the hussar's caped riding-mantle. (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection)

The general commanding the Gendarmerie (the equivalent of a military field police) would ensure that the numbers of *vivandières* and laundresses were not exceeded, and would issue patents to them. Authorized women would carry an oval plaque with the inscription ' *Armée d'Allemagne* ' along the top, in the centre ' *vivandier* ' (again, note the anachronistic male form) or ' *blanchisseuse* ', and below that their patent number. Before these were granted, the regimental councils would first have to attest to their good character and irreproachable conduct. Soldiers were not allowed to act as *vivandiers,* and those who had a *vivandière* for a wife could not themselves dispense any other service. Each wagon owned by a *vivandière* would be marked with a plaque in white metal displaying the name of the proprietor, the number of the regiment to which they were attached and their patent number. Any wagon found without this would be burned, and the horses turned over to the artillery. Regiments had a *vaguemestre* responsible for the management of the baggage and supply train, who would ensure that sutler wagons were correctly marked. (These important NCOs are often thought of as regimental postmen, but their title was a French corruption of the German *Wagenmeister,* ‘wagon master’.)

Grande Armée , 1812

If we apply these 1809 provisions to the *Grande Armée* of 1812, we might estimate how many women went on the campaign to Russia. Using the order of battle for Marshal Davout’s I Corps on 25 June (as given in Otto von Pivka’s *Armies of 1812*), then assuming that there were no redundant places for women, and rounding up the various divisional and reserve trains as equating to a regiment of artillery, we can estimate 222 *vivandières* , 207 laundresses, 21 four-horse wagons, 11 three-horse carts and 397 pack horses, giving a corps total of 429 women and 514 horses.

The strength of I Corps is recorded in the return as 69,556 officers and men, giving us a ratio of one woman for every 162 men. The total number of soldiers who set out on the Russian campaign varies in accounts between 450,000 and 685,000. If we apply the same ratio to a conservative guess of half-a-million troops, then approximately 3,000 official women camp followers would have accompanied them. To these we must add an unknown number of children, plus civilian merchants. Heaven only knows how many of these survived the campaign and the terrible retreat that followed, and even those fortunate enough to get back did so only at great cost. Thinking of his own *cantinière* , who survived the ordeal but was widowed in the process, Sgt Adrien Bourgogne wrote: ‘In Russia she met the fate of all the *cantinières* in the army: she lost horses, carts, money, furs and also her protector.’

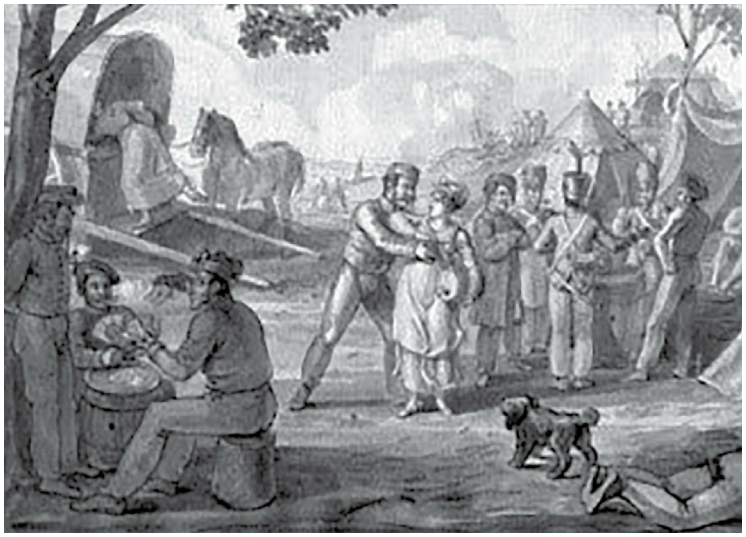
Theoretical number of women camp followers, I Corps, *Grande Armée* , 1812

Formation	Sutlers	Laund -resses	4-horse wagons	3-horse cart	Pack horses
I Corps Headquarters	1	1	0	1	1
1st Division (5 regts in 22 bns with train)	50	46	5	1	90
2nd Division (4 regts in 17 bns with train)	39	36	4	1	70
3rd Division (4 regts in 17 bns with train)	39	36	4	1	70
4th Division (4 regts in 15 bns with train)	35	32	4	1	62
5th Division (4 regts in 20 bns with train)	45	42	4	1	82
1st Light Cav. Brigade (4 squadrons)	5	4	0	1	8
2nd Light Cav. Brigade (4 squadrons)	5	4	0	1	8
Reserve artillery	1	2	0	1	2
Artillery park	1	2	0	1	2
Engineer park	1	2	0	1	2
Totals	222	207	21	11	397

THE ROLE OF *VIVANDIÈRES* & *CANTINIÈRES*

Goods and services

The traditional role of the *vivandière* was to provide for the soldier's needs that were not met in his official rations. In barracks the soldiers divided themselves into messes or *ordinaires,* and pooled cash to purchase food to supplement their daily rations of meat and bread. At that time there was no mention of issued dairy products (butter or cheese) or charcuterie (sausages and ham), and such items were supplied by the sutlers. Wine was issued as part of the official ration, at a daily rate of 250ml (8.4oz) per man; if it was unavailable, an equivalent measure of beer or cider was substituted. *Eau-de-vie* (brandy) was only distributed in exceptional circumstances, such as on the day of battle or after particularly gruelling work. Otherwise, soldiers who wanted a stiff drink had to buy it by the glassful from the *vivandière,* who often carried a *tonnelet* (keg) for the purpose. Surviving later examples from the mid-19th century show these as brightly painted in the national colours, with regimental or patriotic motifs, but in the Napoleonic period they were most likely simple, undecorated wooden kegs with a plug and tap, carried on a leather shoulder-sling. Many depictions also show bottles being carried in a sturdy basket, covered with a napkin. In addition to brandy (never grain alcohol), *vivandières* were specifically required to stock good-quality vinegar. This was used to purify drinking water; sergeants would carry a canteen of it, and soldiers were cautioned to add two spoonfuls to their water canteens.



A *cantinière* (centre) gives the elbow to an amorous soldier intent on more than a tot of brandy, while a second woman (left) unloads supplies from the wagon. The soldiers in the left foreground are playing *La Drogue* , a popular card game played for forfeit rather than money: the loser was required to place a wooden peg over his nose. (Yves Martin)

In 1800 the *vivandières* of the 12th Chasseurs were required to stock 'hair ribbons, powder, pomade, combs, pipe clay, whitening – that is to say, everything necessary for the neatness of the soldier.' Tobacco, clay pipes and flint-and-steel tinder strikers must have been popular, but none of these is included in official lists of issued items. Sutlers also sold writing paper, often with illustrated and sometimes coloured letterheads. With a *lettre de cantinière* and the help of an amenable, literate comrade, conscripts would write to tell their families that they were still alive, and to ask for money. On the subject of which, the sutler-women were also unofficial money-lenders to the officer corps; according to Blaze, 'The chance of seeing some insolvent debtors die was much less to fear than the Cossacks and the gangs of thugs who often took their coins.'

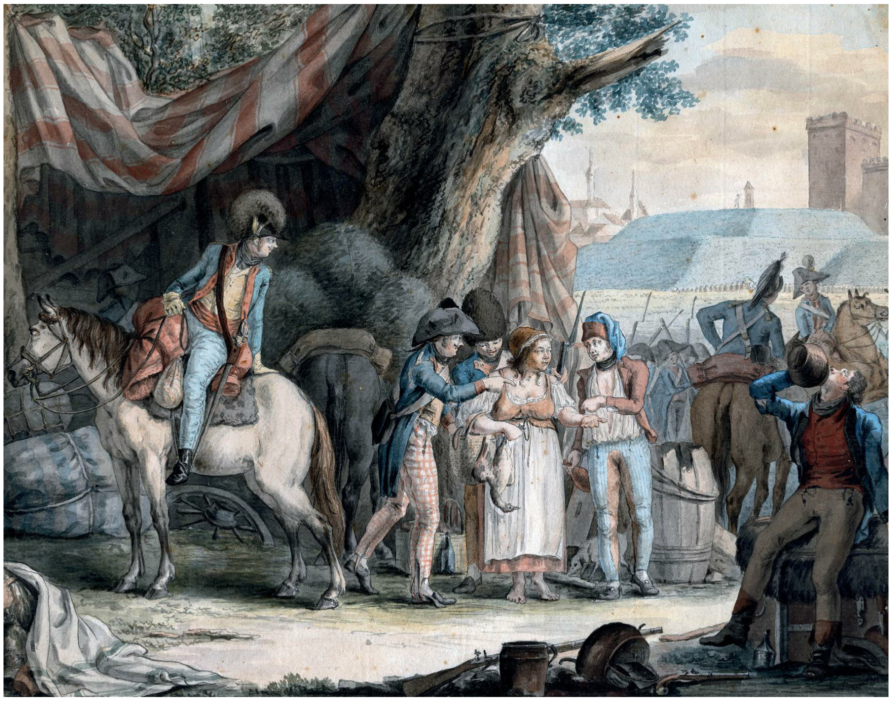
And did the *vivandières* sell more than a smile with the dram of spirits? There is innuendo in many memoirs, but promiscuity is not the same thing as prostitution. Many contemporary images depict *cantinières* being roughly groped by soldiers; was this behaviour typical, or mere bawdy titillation on the part of the artist? While the older women were often addressed respectfully as 'Mother', it would be a mistake to think of Napoleon's soldiers as in any way chaste and virtuous. Girod de l'Ain, the cultured son of a politician, complained that the words 'whore' and 'woman' were synonymous in the vocabulary of common soldiers. Sergeant Bourgogne told of depravity on the retreat from Moscow, when soldiers shared their food with starving women in return for sexual favours.

Interestingly, Blaze writes that the officers also went for the *cantinières* while on campaign. In garrison, he says, they would not have given them a second look; but in the field, where female company was limited, it was a different story. Officers would even invent some trumped-up charge to incarcerate the husband to keep him out of the way, and Blaze wrote that he had known soldiers with a pretty wife to spend half their military career under arrest. Of course, abusive men did not always have things their own way: Sgt Bourgogne remembered how a *cantinière* in his battalion, Mother Dubois, floored the sergeant of the guard with a punch in the face after the latter attempted to escort her to his quarters.

Sutlers' tents

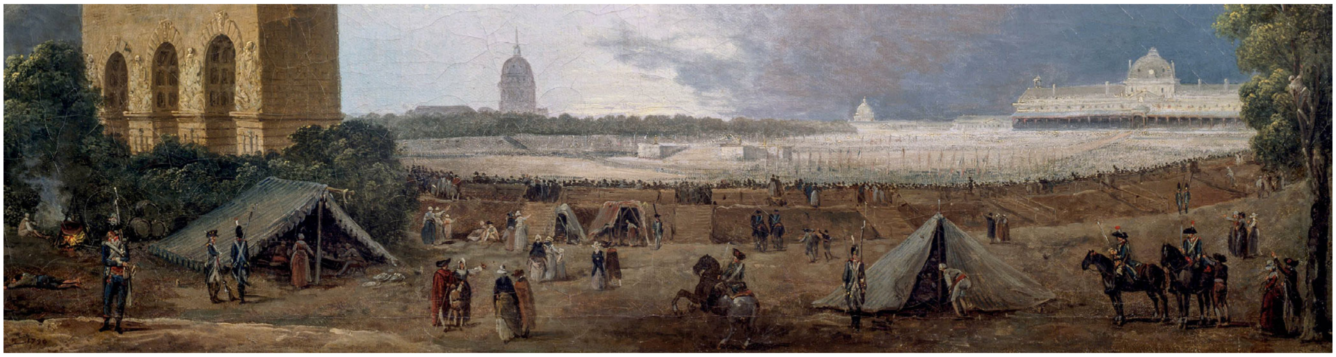
In garrison the *vivandières* were useful, but in camp or on campaign they were essential. There were obvious risks to discipline and security if soldiers wandered off from their units to search for alcohol or other wants. (While a man might be tempted to desert, a woman with a husband in the camp, and a captive market for her goods, had far less incentive to stray.)

At the beginning of our period, when regiments quit their garrisons and went on campaign or summer manoeuvres, soldiers slept in elaborately formed camps, with regimented rows of tents, lanes and main roads, cooking areas and latrines. The camp followers' tents were located 15 metres (49 feet) behind the kitchens, in the same row as the adjutants, drum-major and corporal, musicians and master artificers. Each was allowed a tent of the 'old model' (3.35m long by 2.6m wide/11ft x 8ft 6ins), a size which would ordinarily sleep seven or eight soldiers.



Unsigned watercolour attributed to Dirk Langendyck (1748–1805). The subject is a French camp *c* . 1796, with a fortified town in the distance. Soldiers are purchasing a goose from a barefoot woman, who has a bottle on the ground beside her. The large red-striped tent canopy, thrown over and lashed between tree boughs, shelters large wrapped bundles of supplies, and a horse with bales of forage. (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection)

These camps of 'Prussian' formality did not survive long into the 1790s, however. Tents required wagons and draft animals, which required fodder, and that required logistics, planning and order. With the country on the verge of invasion and open civil war, and under generally paranoid Revolutionary maladministration, the French army abandoned tents. (Besides, tents were damp, nasty places, declared by Gen Lazare Hoche to be 'unRepublican'.) Thereafter, apart from rare moments of peace and stability – usually in winter quarters – when wooden huts could be constructed, the French army lived rough on campaign, bivouacking in rudimentary shelters or beneath the stars.



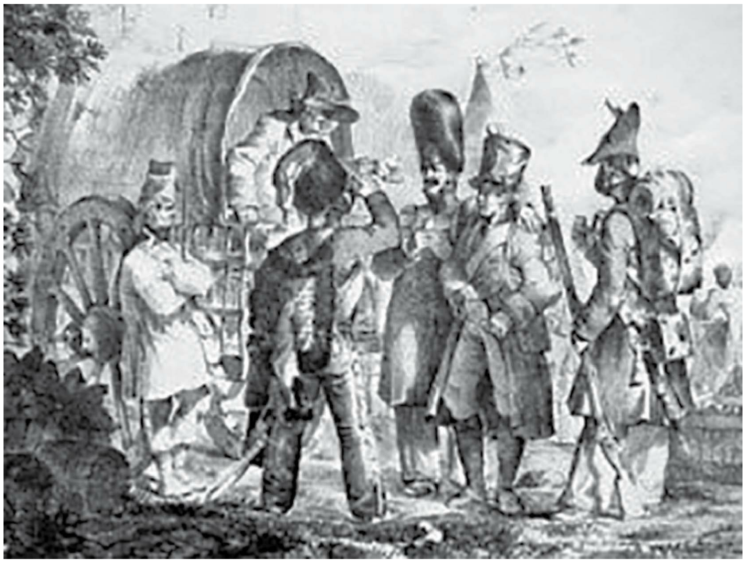
Detail from a painting by Robert Hubert (1733–1808), showing a scene beside the triumphal arch on the Champ de Mars in Paris, 14 July 1790 – the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille. The dome of Les Invalides can be seen in the distance, beyond the arena constructed for the celebration of this first 'Fete of the Federation'. The decorated sutlers' tent (left) is larger than those of the soldiers, and rows of men sit on benches inside. A garland was often hung from the ridge-pole above the entrance, like a tavern sign. (DeAgostini/Getty Images)

The sutler-women did retain their wagons and pack animals, and some retained makeshift tents. These are depicted in contemporary illustrations as large canvas sheets thrown over the bough of a tree, or over long branches cut as poles. The *cantinière* tents appear to have been marked by hanging up a wreath or garland, in much the same way that a sign might identify a tavern, and they became the focal points of the bivouac. Blaze writes:

> In camp, the canteen tent serves as the company salon, tavern, coffee house; it is the central meeting point. We play, we drink, we smoke; because what is there to do in a camp when your only luggage is a portmanteau as big as a sausage, and consequently [you have] no books?

Typically, soldiers were supposed to cook their own meals, but we find evidence of *vivandières* cooking for them. The memoirs of Fezensac speak of sergeant-majors being able to afford to live *en pension* with the sutler-women, who cooked for them and thus freed up their time.

Of course, not all *vivandières* were liked. They worked for money, and could amass a little fortune, although they were not supposed to make excessive profits. Musician Girault recounts an episode when his wife was riding in a *cantinière's* wagon when the horse became frightened,and dragged them all into the Danube. A *voltigeur* quickly saved Girault's wife clinging to the top of the wagon; but the *cantinière* 'was not liked in the regiment, no one wanted to get wet to help her. It was a stranger who saved her.'



An 1817 lithograph by Nicolas-Toussaint Charlet (1792–1845) entitled ' *La bienvenue* ' ('The Welcome'), showing drinks being dispensed from the back of a wagon; under magnification, its tilt appears to be marked '3e Corps'. Interestingly, the sutler seems to be a male civilian, wearing a generously-fitting overcoat. (Yves Martin)

Discipline

Sutlers were strictly forbidden to serve drinks after hours. The 1809 field service regulations levied a first-offence fine of 12 francs on any sutler selling drink after the nightly 'beating of retreat'. If they were caught a second time they were expelled from the army, and soldiers or NCOs found with the sutlers after the 'retreat' would be thrown in prison. Thiébault's staff-officers' manual gave a caution about the excesses sometimes committed:

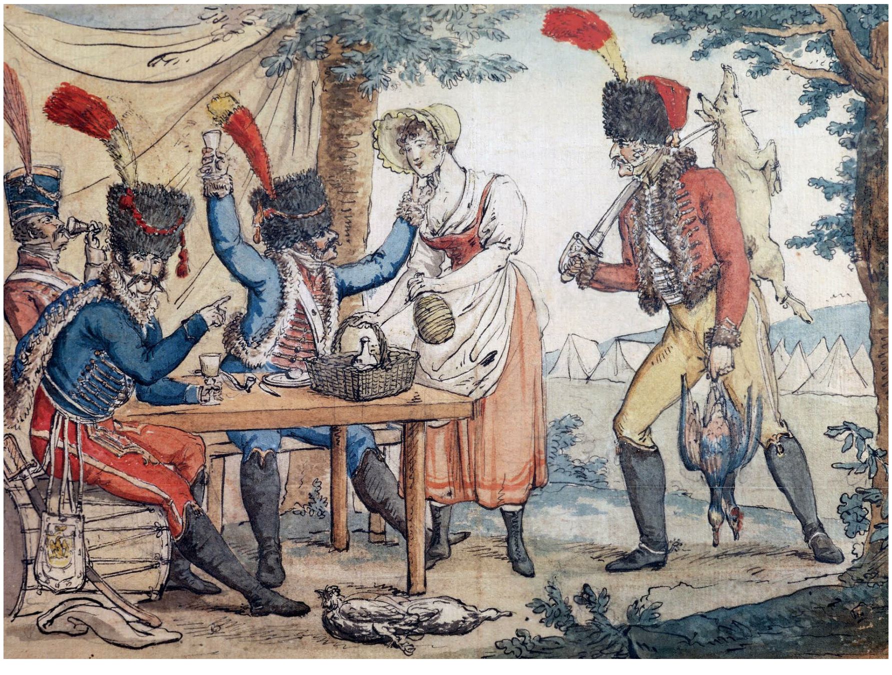
> We can see how useful these sutlers are sometimes; but if they have their advantages, they also have their disadvantages. Often they neglect the needs of the troops, to load their carts with ill-gotten gains. They are the ones who most brazenly engage in marauding and pillage, and who are most often the recipients of everything that soldiers

or people following the army can steal. They must therefore be kept out of necessity, treated with justice, but contained with severity.

The *Code of Crimes and Penalties* of 21 Brumaire, Year V (11 November 1796) has numerous clauses referring to non-combatants present with the army. Sutlers would face ten years in irons for robbing the dead after a battle, unless a general had given them permission to do so. They would receive 20 years if they robbed wounded soldiers. Anyone convicted of mutilating or killing a wounded soldier in order to secure plunder would be sentenced to death. Any sutler found guilty of selling the plunder taken from the wounded or dead by a third party would be expelled from the army, their merchandise seized and sold off for the benefit of the army's field hospitals. The somewhat lesser crime of 'marauding' (theft of property from civilians) would be punished with five years in irons, and a compensation payment to the rightful owner of twice the value of the stolen articles.

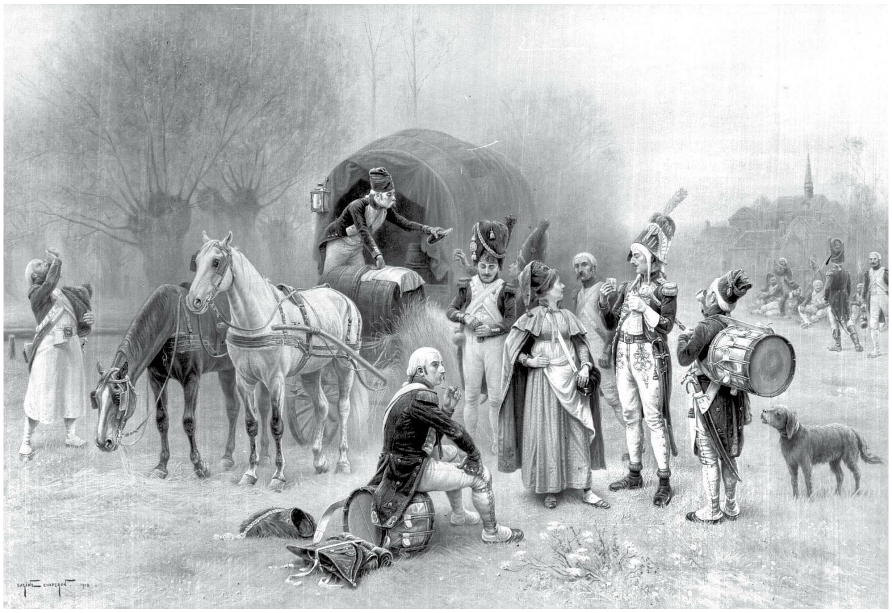
Civilian canteens

The 1813 edition of Paul Thiébault's *Manual for Staff Officers* describes another type of camp follower; these did not belong to any regiment or headquarters, but were authorized to follow the armies and set up restaurants and cafés in the principal places of conquered countries. Thiébault describes these *cantiniers* as 'lemonaders' or caterers who gained permission to follow the army, under the control of the commander of the Gendarmerie or fortress commanders.



A typical 19th century caricature of a Napoleonic *cantinière* . A motley group of hussars carouse with the woman offering bottles, while another arrives with a pig and two birds to be prepared for dinner. The troopers perhaps 'liberated' the table and bench from a nearby house, but sitting on a drum (left) would have been unforgivable since it risked causing damage. (DeAgostini/Getty Images)

The origin of these canteens lay in drinking establishments in the garrison towns across France. When in garrison, soldiers typically stood guard on one night out of six. Otherwise, between the evening meal and the beating of retreat they had little to do with their remaining pocket money but drink and socialize. Traditionally, soldiers would go out and frequent the local *cabarets* (in that period the word simply meant a bar). As soldiers were increasingly housed in barracks rather than billeted on the civilian population, there was an opportunity for military canteens to be set up selling cut-price drink (garrison canteens did not have to pay the same tax duties as their civilian counterparts). As the French armies marched off and conquered Europe, these canteens packed up and followed them. As we have seen, in time the word *cantinières* became interchangeable with *vivandières* to describe the official sutler-women, but it is worth remembering that it also applied to freelance merchants who followed the army.



Romanticized image of a *vivandière* from 1912, by Eugène Chaperon (1857–1938). The folded-over apron is correct for our period, but again the artist shows the damaging habit of sitting on a tipped-over drum. A uniformed soldier (presumably the husband *vivandier*) serves drinks from the wagon. (Roger-Viollet/Topfoto)

We see evidence for their establishments in the memoirs which describe the great army camps that were set up periodically. For example, Girod de l'Ain speaks of 'superb' cafeterias and restaurants set up behind the camp of Napoléonbourg near Berlin in 1808. According to the memoirs of Vigo-Roussillon, the army camp at Montreuil near Boulogne in 1804 also had restaurants, and even cafés with billiard tables. Thiébault remarked that these civilians needed to be closely monitored to ensure that they did not open gambling-houses in their premises.

It was only natural that these men took their wives with them, and there is evidence for this in the memoirs of Philippe-René Girault, a musician in the 93rd Line. Girault writes of a male *cantinier* and his *cantinière* wife whom he encountered on the island of Lobau in 1809. The battle of Aspern-Essling (21–22 May) had just been fought when Giraud returned to his hutted camp. The next hut along, which belonged to the merchant couple, had been left empty, with a stew cooking over the fire. The French army had been forced to retreat onto Lobau, and Girault suspected that his neighbours had fled in the belief of a French defeat. Since he did not expect them back, he finished cooking the stew and had an excellent supper:

> We had just finished, when we saw the *cantinière* arrive. She rushed into her hut like a crazy person. She had forgotten her purse, which was very plump, and as she found it intact, she was beside herself with joy. Instead of blaming us for having eaten her provisions, she thanked us for having looked after her hut and therefore her purse. Her husband arrived a moment later with his wagon. She drew from it several bottles of

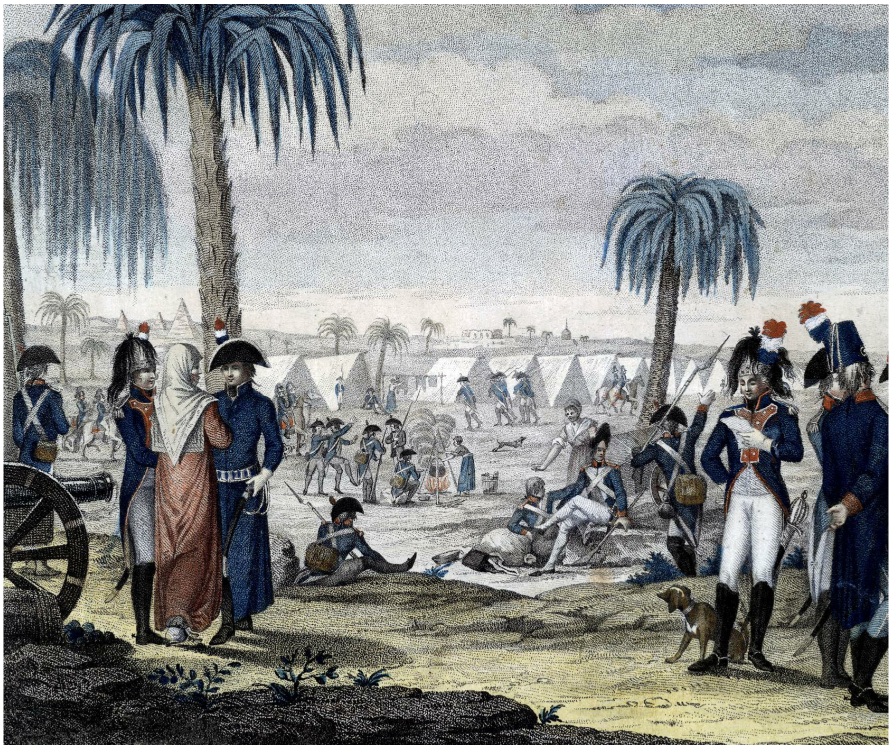
wine which she offered us. I believe she would have given us all of her merchandise, she was so happy to have found her money.

BLANCHISSEUSES

In barracks and camp

The role of *blanchisseuse* (laundress) was well established by the time of the Revolution. The French word derives from the verb *blanchir* ('to make white'), and laundresses were soldiers' wives paid to wash the unit's linen. Soldiers all contributed for communal expenses, including the cost of laundering one shirt per week. The rules on company deductions say nothing about laundering the soldiers' linen drawers (*caleçon*); not every regiment issued underwear, and its use was not prevalent at the time.

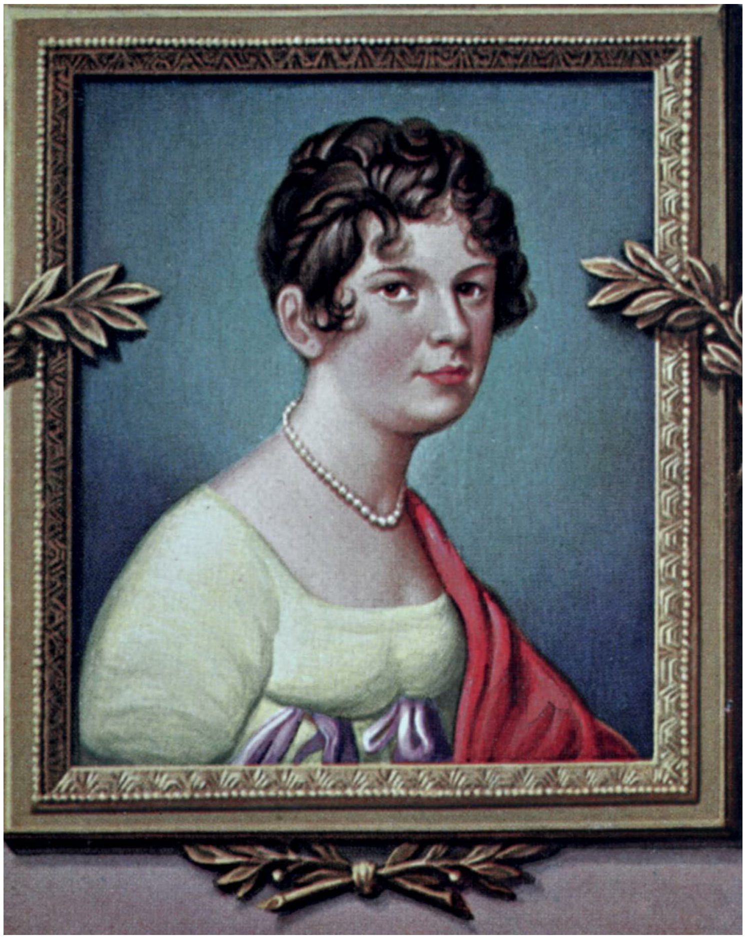
It is unclear if Bardin is referring to the Napoleonic period or the years immediately following when he states that laundresses in garrison would collect the soldiers' linen on a Monday and return it on a Saturday. When the regiment was in barracks, the regulation of 1 March 1768 stated that laundresses' rooms should be located on the ground floor. This kept them away from the soldiers' bedchambers, and avoided them having to carry heavy tubs and loads of clothing upstairs. Bardin gives the weight of a soldier's shirt at 534g (18oz, just over 1lb in weight). Before 1808 battalions might each have over a thousand men, so their shirts would total about half a ton of linen to carry, between two women. An instruction of 29 Floréal, Year VII (18 May 1799) relating to the quartering of French troops allowed two rooms per battalion for the laundresses.



Impression of a French camp in Egypt in 1797, by Francesco Novelli (1794–1836). In the foreground, two French soldiers converse with an Egyptian woman, but three European women can also be seen. One (shown very small in centre background) is hanging shirts on a washing line; another (centre) is boiling a cauldron, with a wooden laundry tub behind her; and a third (right) chats with seated soldiers. (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection)

The process of laundering clothes was slow and labour-intensive. The linen would be collected and sorted, first by the thickness of the cloth, then by how dirty it was. Soaps might be applied to the most heavily soiled parts, and if possible there was a pre-wash soak. (Although known for centuries, 'Marseilles soap' made from seawater, vegetable oils and alkaline ash does not appear to have been widely used in France until later in the 19th century.) The next step was to layer the shirts in a large wooden vat. A canvas sheet was carefully laid over the top of the laundry, and then a layer of cold wood ash was spread on top of the canvas. Hot water was poured over the ash and allowed to percolate through the canvas and linen, draining via a plug near the base. This process released chemicals in the ash which contributed to the cleaning process. The dirty water would be collected, re-boiled and poured back over the ashes for a second percolation.

After this, the linen was removed from the vat and rinsed in running water at a river, stream or public fountain. The laundress placed the linen on a washboard and brushed it, then beat it with a paddle, and any remaining stains would be tackled with more ash. When kneeling by a river, laundresses often used a knee-guard – a wooden crate stuffed with straw. When clean, the linen was wrung out and hung up to dry, before being folded and returned. Presumably soldiers must have labelled their linen in some way, or else there would have been something of a free-for-all when it was returned at the end of the week.



The French Revolution brought about unprecedented social mobility. In 1783 a laundress named Catherine Hübscher (1753–1835) married a Guardsman, François Joseph Lefebvre. This soldier rose to the rank of marshal in 1804, and received the title of Duke of Danzig in 1807. As a duchess, Catherine's plain speaking sometimes set her at odds with other members of the Imperial Court, but Napoleon found this amusing. Note the hair worn uncovered, the ribbon tied immediately below the bust, and the shawl over one shoulder. (Bildagentur-online/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

It is unclear if the linen was pressed with an iron after drying. Rudimentary clothes irons did exist, but there was no stipulation in the regulations for shirts to be pressed. The only clue is an oblique reference in Louis Gabriel Montigny's tale about the *cantinière* Marie Tête-du-Bois (see below), who during the First Restoration (1814–15) took work as a laundress, but then 'sold her irons' to purchase a brandy barrel when Napoleon returned. With or without irons, the weight of the wooden equipment needed makes it clear why laundresses need pack horses for transport.

On campaign

We are forced to wonder to what extent these processes would be followed on campaign. The regulations spoke of the placement of the laundresses' tents in camps, but the army abandoned its tents in the early 1790s; during the imperial period it was only in static camps of wooden huts that laundresses would have been able to establish themselves effectively. During Napoleon's fast-moving campaigns, a soldier who left his shirt with a laundress might have found himself more than a hundred miles away from it by the end of the week.

We read of soldiers throwing away spare shirts on the first day of a march (see Blaze); and there is an episode in Coignet's memoirs where he goes to prepare his laundry at the end of the campaign, only for it to disintegrate in his hands. In the memoirs of Girod de l'Ain, a freshly arrived subaltern in the 1807 Eylau campaign, the author recounts how he took the opportunity to wash his linen when billeted with a Polish family, only for Prussian cavalry to arrive unexpectedly, forcing him to abandon the wet clothes and dress without them as swiftly as possible. Clearly, Girod did not have access to a battalion laundress.

If the laundresses were not cleaning shirts during campaigns, then one wonders what they were doing; it is difficult to believe that they did not attempt to follow their husbands. From sheer expediency, did the roles of *vivandière* and *blanchisseuse* merge when on campaign? Already in 1793 we see references to a ' *vivandière-blanchisseuse* ' named Anne-Marie Waroquy following the 2nd Battalion of Paris Volunteers. Several other sources suggest a similar pairing of the two roles, but this did not always meet official approval. In 1794 in the Army of the North, Gen of Division (later Marshal) MacDonald felt obliged to issue an order:

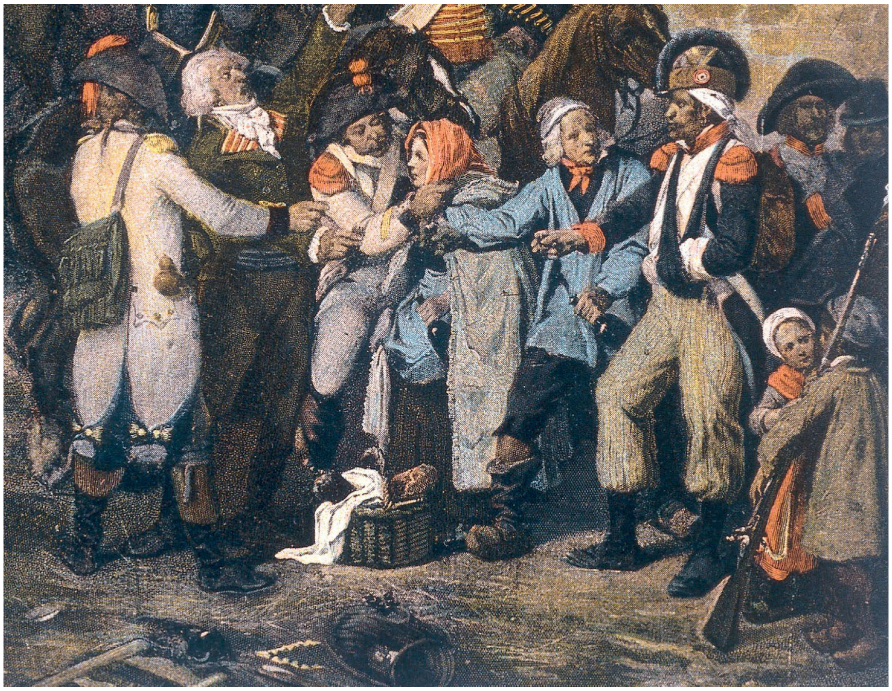
> General Macdonald is also informed that several laundresses received by the chiefs to do the soldiers' laundry, have made themselves *vivandières* in order to have a more lucrative profit. The general is astonished that several chiefs have closed their eyes to such an abuse and have not repressed it. He instructs them to ensure that laundresses do their job exactly. They can nevertheless make any other trade provided that the soldiers are cleaned. The chiefs will drive out of their corps any *vivandières* or laundresses who do not conform exactly to this order and will not [tolerate] others than the number prescribed by law.

There is a relevant example of commercial mobility in the *Journal du capitaine François* , recounting his days as a *fourrier* (quartermaster corporal) in the 9th Half-Brigade of the Line. The author befriended a 17-year-old laundress who was married to an old German sergeant recently incorporated into François' unit. The laundress took a shine to François, so he set about bettering her position. He had recently embezzled some army funds (taking his lead from the example of the commissariat), and bought the girl a brandy barrel and some small glasses. Obtaining a patent of *vivandière* for her from his *chef de bataillon,* François then 'requisitioned' two horses from a wealthy farmer, and purchased a light cart so that the young lady was able to purchase goods in bulk. To spare the *vivandière* the fatigue of walking, François obtained her a riding horse by 'blowing out the brains' of a mounted enemy *vedette* . The profits of her trade in turn enriched the old sergeant, who clearly could not believe his luck. Taking a philosophical view of the relationship between his wife and her new sponsor, the sergeant generously said to François: ‘ *Fourrier* , my wife is at your service.’

COSTUME

Vivandières and laundresses in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods wore ordinary civilian clothes. In the mid-19th century, under the Second Empire, *cantinières* were indeed dressed in quasi-military costumes, and this has unfortunately deceived later artists into retrospectively depicting those of the Napoleonic Wars wearing similar styles. Their attractive appeal in popular artwork, such as that in the 1898 book *La Cantinière* by Jacques Onfroy de Breville ('JOB'), has had the effect of embedding such mistaken interpretations.

Granted, we have a description by Blaze of some *cantinières* wearing hussar boots and forage caps; but he also describes these same ladies dressed in velvet or satin ball gowns, looted by soldiers and traded in return for brandy. Blaze was pointing out both episodes as ridiculous, rather than mundane. In a more tragic context, the staff officer Eugène Labaume described the appearance of women who joined the retreat from Moscow in 1812: 'Most of them were on foot, in cloth shoes, and dressed in poor dresses of silk or percale; they covered themselves with pieces of pelisse or soldiers' greatcoats, taken from corpses.' (A note of caution: here he is describing French civilian women fleeing Moscow, not official army camp followers.)



Detail of the 'Arrival of the French Army in Mons' by Hippolyte Bellangé, a painting from 1836 depicting a scene from 1792. Soldiers are buying drinks from a male and a female sutler, who pour them from green glass bottles. The woman wears a red headscarf, a light grey hooded cape, a light brown gown and a pale blue apron. (akg-images via Getty Images)

While one accepts that sutler-women on campaign may occasionally have worn military garments taken from the dead (though technically this was illegal), ordinarily they wore civilian clothing. What we know of their fashions is mostly found in contemporary artwork, as the illustrations and colour plates in this book indicate. Written descriptions of *vivandière* costume are rare. There is Blaze's riotous description, and here is another. While the army crossed the Danube by a ford during the 1809 campaign, the pharmacist Charles Louis Cadet de Gassicourt spent some time chatting to a *vivandière* washing clothes at the water's edge. This is how he remembered her:

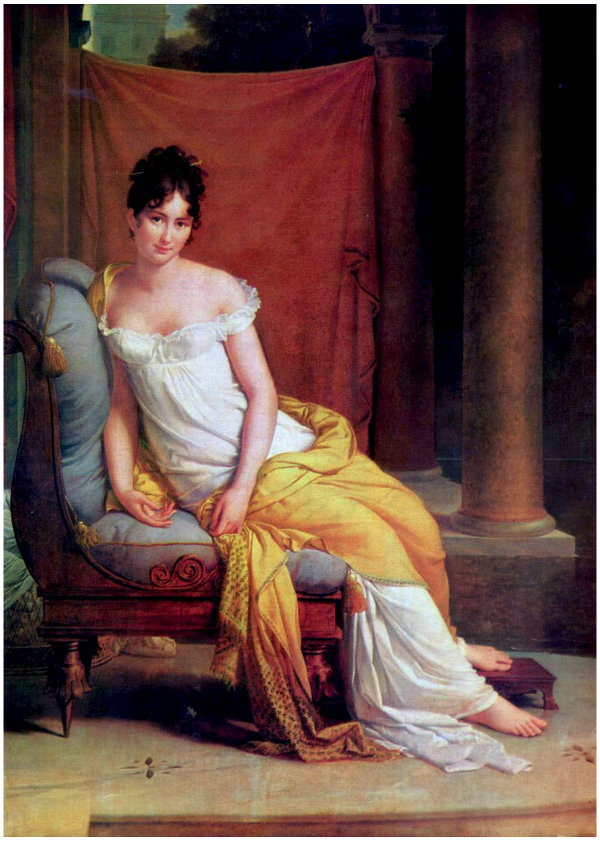
> She had a baby at her breast; two other young children were playing [in her] cart. A captured horse, very thin, ate its oats while harnessed to the shafts. A barrel of white wine, two small barrels, three bags and a few tin pots made up the load of the small carriage. This *vivandière* was about thirty to thirty-four years old. Her outfit was bizarre, but clean. [It] consisted of a painted canvas skirt, a grey cloth jacket, a hide belt, gaiters, an old felt hat that covered her head already wrapped in a handkerchief *en marmotte* [i.e. tied under the chin] . Without being ugly or pretty, her face had much expression.

Note that Gassicourt found her costume 'bizarre' – in other words, she stood out from other camp followers whom he had seen. Like Blaze's examples, she represents an exception from the norm. So what did our Napoleonic women habitually wear?

We must first consider their likely social standing: they were, for the most part, from the rural peasantry and urban working classes. Many were the daughters of soldiers and had grown up around the regiment. While it is not impossible, very few would have been from the well-heeled bourgeoisie, except perhaps in fashionable National Guard units in the early 1790s. That said, a successful *vivandière* could make a lot of money, and (unless her husband was a stupid tyrant) there was no reason for her to be dressed in rags. Given the transactional nature of their role, then – the privations of campaign life notwithstanding – they perhaps attracted greater patronage if they dressed reasonably well.

The early 1790s

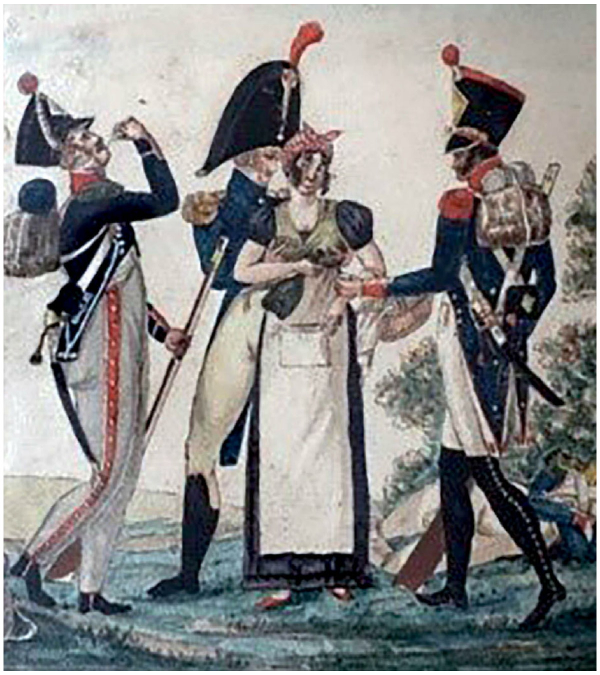
In the first years of the Revolutionary Wars the majority of camp followers would have been dressed as follows. Underwear consisted only of a long, short-sleeved cotton or linen undershirt (*chemise*), and stockings made from cotton or wool, held in place with a garter ribbon tied below the knee. French women did not begin wearing drawers until after the fashion was introduced by the Austrian-born Empress Marie-Louise, who became Napoleon's second wife in 1810. Around the torso women wore a 'stay' or corset made from linen, laced at the front and fitted around the waist and below the bust. To flatten the stomach and help the corset to retain its shape, a wooden horn, or sometimes metal 'busk' was placed at the front of the garment. While helping to create an elegant form, the stay also had the practical function for working women of providing some body-support when carrying heavy loads.



An 1802 portrait of ‘Juliette’ Récamier by François Gérard (1770–1837). This famous Parisian hostess and socialite is wearing a light neo-Classical dress and a shawl typical of the Directory, Consulate and early Empire periods. Although details changed, the basic high-waisted ‘Empire line’ lasted into the 1820s. (Fine Art Images/ Heritage Images/ Getty Images)

For shape and warmth, one or more petticoats were worn over the *chemise* . Hanging pockets were worn around the waist – simple pouches which could be accessed through openings in the sides of the skirt, which was worn over the petticoats. The skirt was of thicker material, and was fastened by ties at the sides which allowed it to be adjusted (e.g. during pregnancy). An apron was worn over the skirt for protection while working, and many contemporary images show one corner of the apron lifted up and tucked into the waistband, creating a triangular pouch.

An important part of the costume was the *fichu* (a term derived from an adjective meaning ‘carelessly thrown on’). This scarf or neckerchief was typically formed from a square piece of linen folded into a triangle, worn around the neck with the ends hanging down in front to cover the low neckline of the stay and chemise. A jacket was often worn over the stay, and/or a full-length gown might be worn in place of a skirt. In bad weather a long, hooded cape was worn over all.



Detail from an illustration entitled ‘ *Halte de grenadiers et voltigeurs* ’ , depicting infantry uniforms *c* . 1809–12. The *cantinière* wears a red-and-white chequered headscarf and a dark, short-sleeved gown; note the integral pocket in the front of her apron. She has no slung keg, but pours drinks from a bottle taken from a basket on her left arm. (Yves Martin)

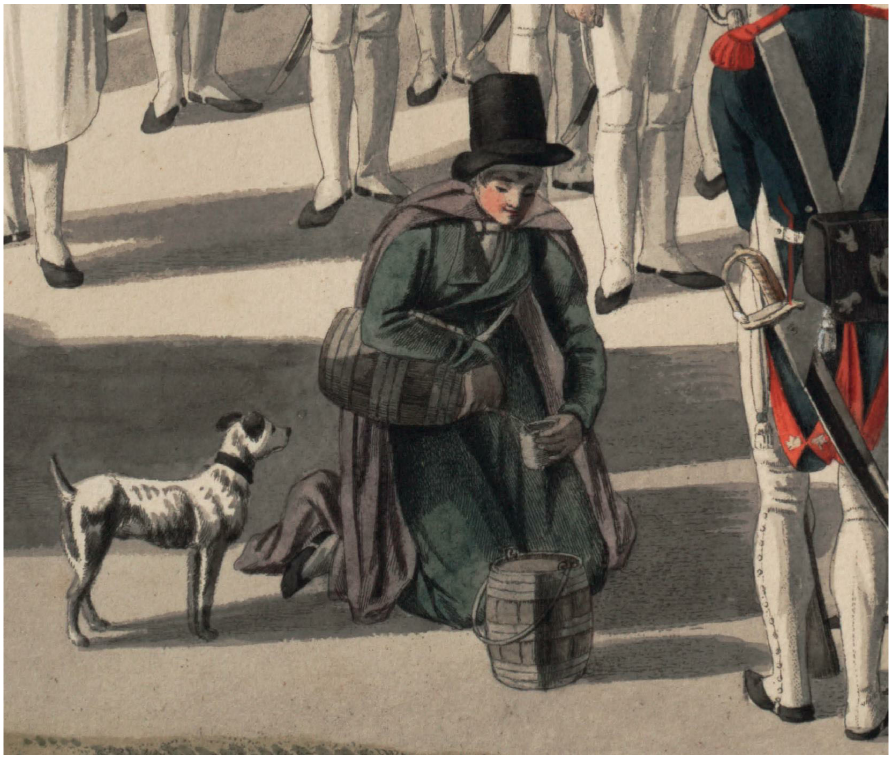
Most drawings show the women wearing leather shoes rather than wooden clogs. They wore their hair gathered up off the neck, and, as was typical in countries with a Christian tradition, in public they always covered their heads with a linen cap (*coiffe*), perhaps with a straw or felt hat over the top of this. (To wear the hair uncovered was traditionally considered a sign of a woman of ill repute.) To this typical costume we can add the wooden keg (*tonnelet*) slung over the shoulder on a leather strap, and/or a wickerwork hand-basket with its contents covered by a napkin.

There was a 26-year period between the storming of the Bastille in 1789 and the bloody nightfall of Waterloo in 1815, and during that passage of time civilian fashions changed significantly. (For a comparable time-lapse, we might contrast British ‘utility’ fashions of 1945 with the ‘hippie’ styles of the late 1960s, or the ‘hot-pants’ and ‘flares’ of 1971.) Even in an age long predating the imitative effects of mass-media culture, the styles worn by ordinary people were influenced to some extent by the high fashion of the era. It is therefore useful to take a broad look at such changes over our period.

From Revolution to Directory and Empire

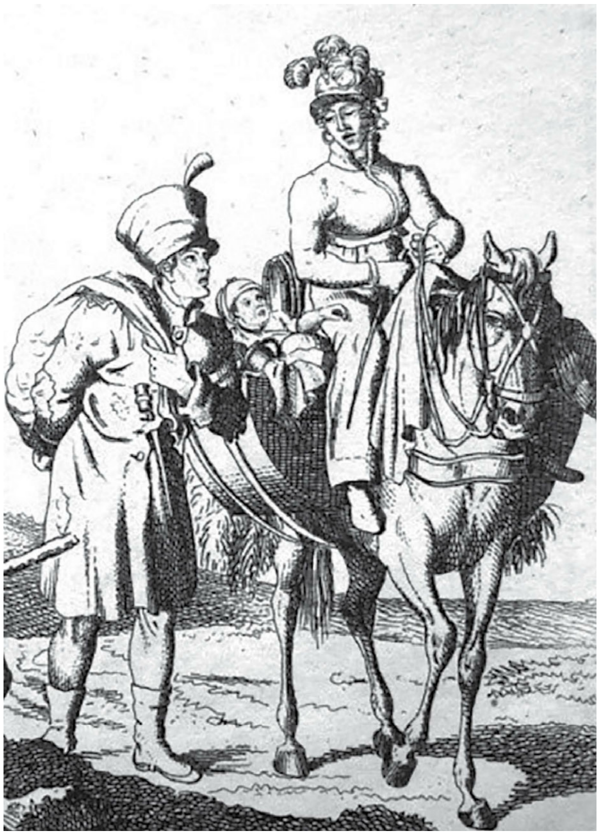
After the Revolution there was a rejection of elaborate aristocratic garments which required servants to help with dressing, and moves away from expensive silks, embroidery and outlandish wigs. Clothes eventually became more natural in style, allowing freedom of movement. In terms of women’s fashion, the real revolution occurred in 1795. With the fall of Citizen Robespierre’s Committee of Public Safety and the end of the Jacobin ‘Terror’, people breathed a collective sigh of relief, and this relaxation would be reflected in women’s clothing.

Following the Revolution, popular fashion was inspired by neo-Classicism – re-imagined examples of Greek and Roman tunics and *chitons.* Heavily-boned corsetry was abandoned by fashionable women, along with excessive petticoats and thick fabrics, in favour of sheer, silhouette-clinging muslin dresses. These often left little to the imagination; necklines plunged, exposing the *décolletage,* and the styles adopted by some fashionable young *Incroyables* and *Merveilleuses* scandalized Europe. While it is unlikely that army camp followers would have been as bold as fashionable *Parisiennes* , this period of change had an important impact on fashion across all classes: the creation of what was initially called the 'Directory style' (after the *Directoire* government of 1795–99), and later became the 'Empire line'.



Excellent 1809 illustration of a *cantinière,* in a detail from a painting by Wilhelm von Kobell (1766–1853). She wears a top hat, and a long-sleeved green gown under a grey cape. Small dogs are very common in contemporary depictions of women camp followers. (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection)

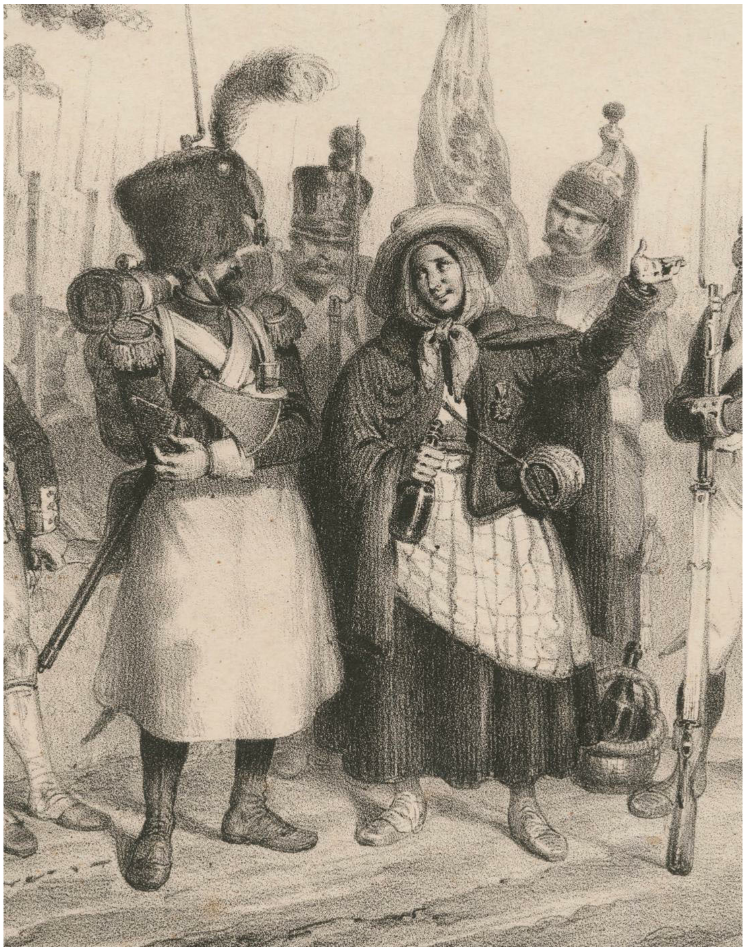
In the second half of the 1790s the waistline of dresses began to rise. The bodice section would end just below the bust, above a gathered skirt which fell naturally down the body. The high waist was often accentuated with a tie or hem under the bust, sometimes in a contrasting colour, and sleeves were short, revealing the arms. Through habit, some still wore corsetry and petticoats beneath the dress, but both would have been lighter than previously. Dresses were typically made from thin and affordable fabrics, such as muslin. Soldiers returning from the Egyptian expedition brought with them cashmere shawls, which became very popular for adding warmth. Although shawls had a practical function, they quickly became an important fashion accessory in their own right, and were worn in all manner of styles – the Empress Josephine being a leading exponent.



The contemporary artwork of Leopold Beyer (1784– *c* .1870) provides excellent details of the French army in 1813–14; this sketch shows a mounted *cantinière* alongside a soldier collecting supplies. The woman rides astride, with her legs in front of large panniers; her young child is carried in the nearside basket, and a notably large keg behind the saddle, above what appears to be a hanging load of forage. She wears a feathered bonnet, and, over her gown, a 'Spencer' jacket reaching down to just below her bust. (Martin Lancaster)

The rising waistline and the lightness of dress material saw the adoption of the 'Spencer' jacket – an English innovation which found its way to France. This garment had its ludicrous origins in a fireside accident suffered by the 2nd Earl Spencer, but, translated into female fashion, the Spencer was styled so that it reached down only to the waistline of the dress (i.e. just below the bust), while covering the arms. Another innovation for women was the adoption of the *redingote* , a French rendition of the English 'riding coat' previously worn only by men. Usually full-length and long-sleeved, these were practical for *cantinières* who might otherwise have worn capes. There was also the *pelisse;* a long- or short-sleeved coat of Central Asian steppe origins, lined or edged with fur, this was usually worn opened at the front. The long-sleeved version cut short to the hips, to facilitate riding, was most commonly associated with the hussar regiments of the period, but women are also illustrated in full-length versions.

Civilian fashions in womens' hairstyles and headgear also changed over time. Short hair became popular during the Consulate period; this was partly in imitation of the male, Roman-inspired *à la Titus* style, and partly also of the *à la victime* affectation, mimicking the short-hacked hair of guillotine victims. Women were also seen in public with their heads uncovered, the traditional caps being replaced with a simple ribbon or headband. However, these innovations do not appear to have been adopted by camp followers. We typically see *vivandières* wearing felt top hats, bonnets, or wide-brimmed hats (particularly under the hot sun of Spain). Headscarves were usually worn beneath these hats, keeping the hair gathered up.

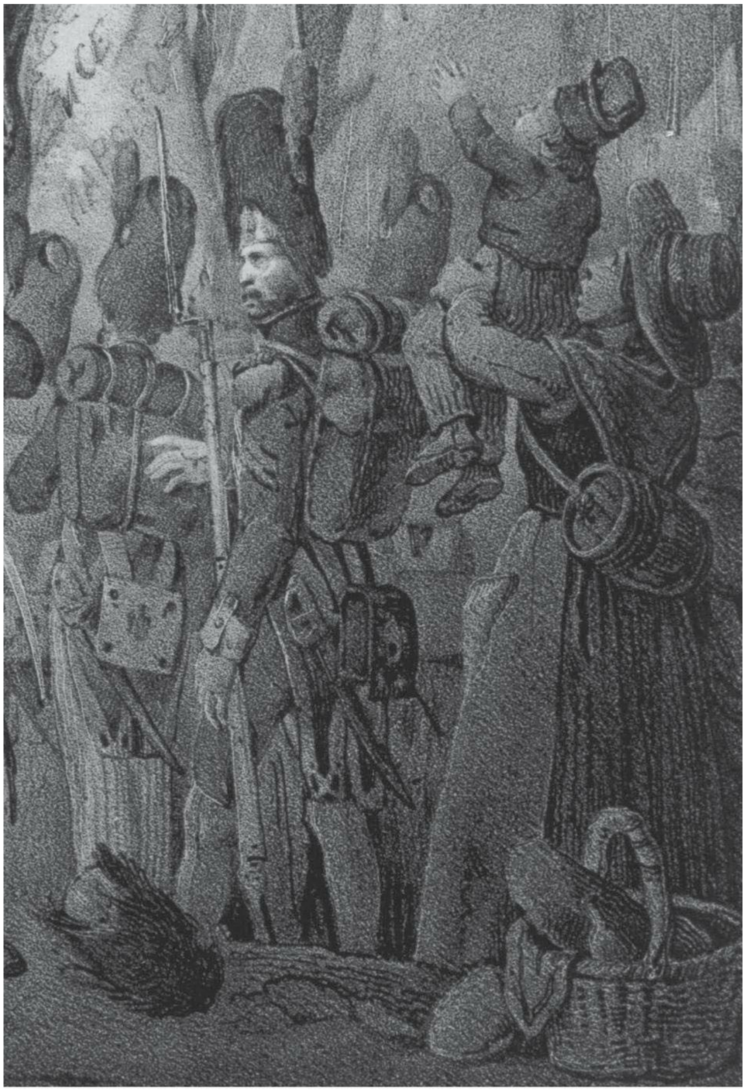


' *La Vivandière* ', detail from a lithograph after Clément Pruche (1811–90). While generally convincing, this image dates from 1840, which may explain why the brandy keg appears smaller than usual, and the waistline of her clothing seems to be just above the hips, as was increasingly common from the 1820s onwards. (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection)

With the Revolution 20 years in the past, and France at the height of its imperial pomp and formality, fashion continued to develop in the 1810s. It was unfortunate for Frenchwomen that fashionable styles relied heavily on fabrics imported from England, such as muslin and cotton. Napoleon's 'continental system' embargo restricted the import of British goods, so light dresses began to give way to those made of thicker fabrics, carrying more ornamentation. In a return of modesty, the arms and chest once again became covered. Instead of the standard *fichu* covering the *décolletage* , we see an increase in lace collars; lace (*dentelle*) had fallen out of favour in the Revolution, but Napoleon revived the industry. The Empire line remained fashionable until 1820, when waistlines began to lower and we begin to see the corseted 'hourglass' figure emerge.

Revolutionary cockades

In the early Revolutionary period we also sometimes see clothes and ribbons in the new national colours of red, white and blue, but not so widely as one might expect. These national colours can be described as the blue-and-red of Paris (and the uniform of the old *Gardes Françaises,* who assisted with the Revolution), overlaying the white of the Bourbon monarchy. On 3 April 1793 a decree required all men to wear a cockade in the national colours, but, since the male legislators considered that women should play no part in public or political life, they were ignored.



Detail from an engraving of *c* . 1830 after Victor Jean Adam (1801–66), depicting the first distribution of the Legion of Honour at the camp of Boulogne on 16 August 1804. Standing behind a grenadier, a *cantinière* (identified by her brandy barrel and basket) holds aloft her young son, an *enfant de troupe* wearing uniform with a *bonnet de police* cap. (Roger-Viollet/Topfoto)

Consequently, a new conflict emerged on the streets of Paris which we might summarize as ‘feminists versus fishwives’. On the one hand were militant, politically-engaged women who formed clubs and lobbied for emancipation, brazenly adopting the tricolour cockade. On the other side were the conservative market women, who believed that ‘only whores and Jacobins wear cockades’. Such serious violence erupted between the two factions that the government felt compelled to legislate on 21 September 1793: all women were henceforth required to wear the national symbol. This being France, brawls then ensued over different interpretations of this law, since it had not specified exactly how or in what form a cockade should be worn. Exasperated, a month later the government prohibited women’s political clubs altogether.

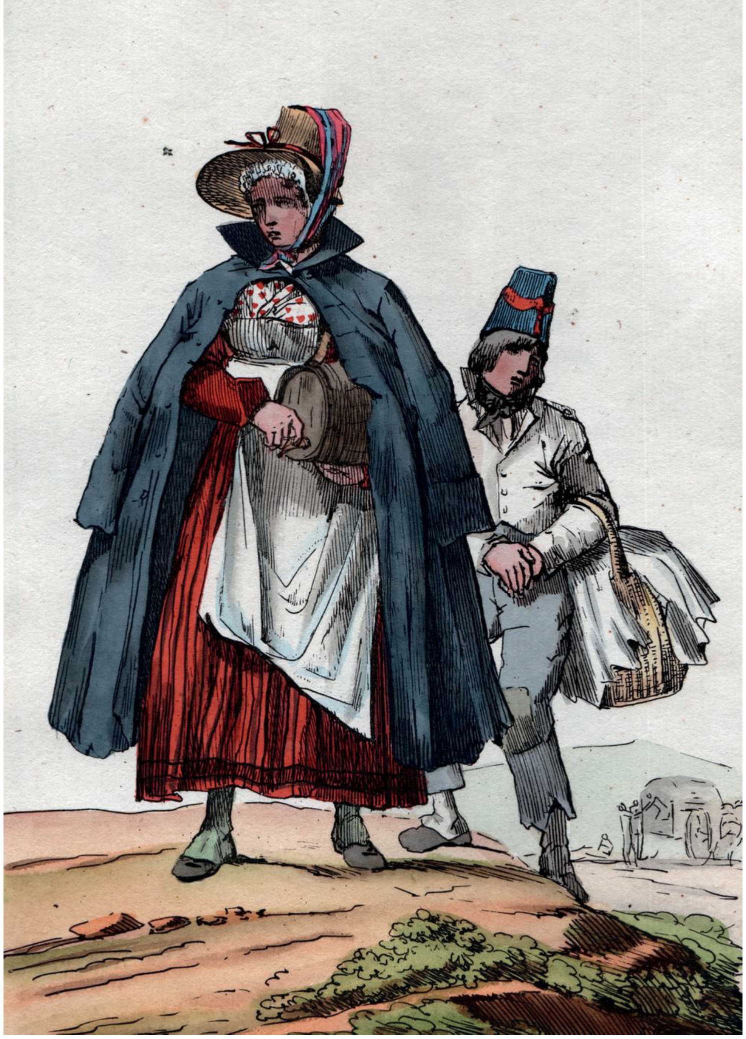
It is actually very difficult to find in contemporary pictures examples of women wearing the cockade while following the army. It was traditionally the symbol of armed servicemen under military authority. Since sutler-women were neither soldiers nor public servants, perhaps their wearing the symbol of exclusively male institutions would have been seen as provocative.

THE REGIMENTAL CHILDREN

The *ancien régime*

The unions of soldiers and their camp-follower wives naturally produced children. There are many accounts of babies being born in the most challenging of circumstances, and of children following their mothers on campaign. Blaze writes of their mothers' hardiness: 'These ladies gave birth, on the road, at the foot of a tree, continued their journey, and the mother and the child were well. They never had vapours, nor nervous diseases, and never [received] barley water, nor herbal teas…'.

Female children had no official place in the regiment, and most likely worked with their mothers until such time as they could be married off at the earliest opportunity. Boys, on the other hand, were the soldiers of the future, and some could be enlisted as *enfants de troupe* . The ordinance of 1 May 1766 had allowed one child per company aged between 10 and 16 years, given the same pay as a soldier, and able to contract an 8-year engagement with the army on his 16th birthday (the normal age of enlistment was 18). On 17 March 1788 the law was amended, admitting two children per company, now being selected at the age of 6 to 8 years. In return for half-pay, these children had to serve an apprenticeship with one of the regimental master artificers (*maître-ouvriers*), such as armourers, tailors, cordwainers (shoe-makers) and gaiter-makers; each of these specialists was required to take two apprentices. The remainder of the *enfants de troupe* were attached to the regimental band and taught to play instruments. On reaching the age of 16, boys had to formally enlist, or to pay back 100 *livres* to be released from this obligation. On 1 January 1791 the position of *enfant de troupe* was abolished, but this ruling seems to have been ignored, and children continued to be maintained unofficially.



A *cantinière* and *enfant de troupe,* by Nicolas-Toussaint Charlet. This woman appears to be wearing a soldier's greatcoat rather than a more typical cape or *redingote,* and note the bonnet with an extended front brim, worn over a *coiffe.* Her son is dressed typically, with a uniform cap, jacket and trousers, and carries his mother's basket. He looks as if he might be 14 – the official lower age limit for trainee musicians to leave the regimental depot and accompany the unit on campaign. (Yves Martin)

Law of 26 July 1800

The institution of *enfants de troupe* was formally restored on 26 July 1800 (7 Thermidor, Year VIII) under the same law that regulated their mothers. Each company could select at just 2 years old two children to be paid, clothed, housed and fed at the expense of the state (the companies of artillery, sappers, miners and veterans were allowed only one boy). They had to be the legitimate sons of a 'defender of the fatherland' and a woman attached to the corps as a laundress or *vivandière* . Priority was given to the sons of common soldiers, then of non-commissioned officers, then the sons of officers, in that order, and in each case preference was given to orphans. At 16 they were allowed to enlist on full pay.

An officer of the unit, two sergeants and four corporals were put in charge of the children's instruction, teaching them to read, write, calculate sums, run, swim, and so on. The master-artificers would each take on at least two apprentices, and those attached to the corps of miners and sappers were also instructed in engineering and fieldworks. The remainder would be trained as musicians. Initially there was a hierarchy among the children; those in the second class were on half-pay, but would gain promotion to the first class after demonstrating sufficient progress in their education. After 18 Vendémiaire X (10 October 1801) only a single class of child was recognized, and all received half-pay.

While the regiment was on active service the young boys would remain at the depot, but from the age of 14 they were allowed to serve with the musicians on full pay. Officially, they had to be at least 16 to serve as drummers, but this last stipulation can be taken with a pinch of salt; drummers were selected by the unit commander from among those he judged most suitable. The law of 8 Floréal XI (28 April 1803) confirmed that the pensions of both drummers and trumpeters could count from the age of 14, while other soldiers could only claim for service from the age of 16.

Having grown up in barracks under the instruction of soldiers, these graduates of the regimental depot were far more useful than the average raw conscript dragged off a farm at the age of 20. They provided an excellent pool of future non-commissioned officers, and, thanks to the Revolution, had the opportunity to progress to the officer corps.

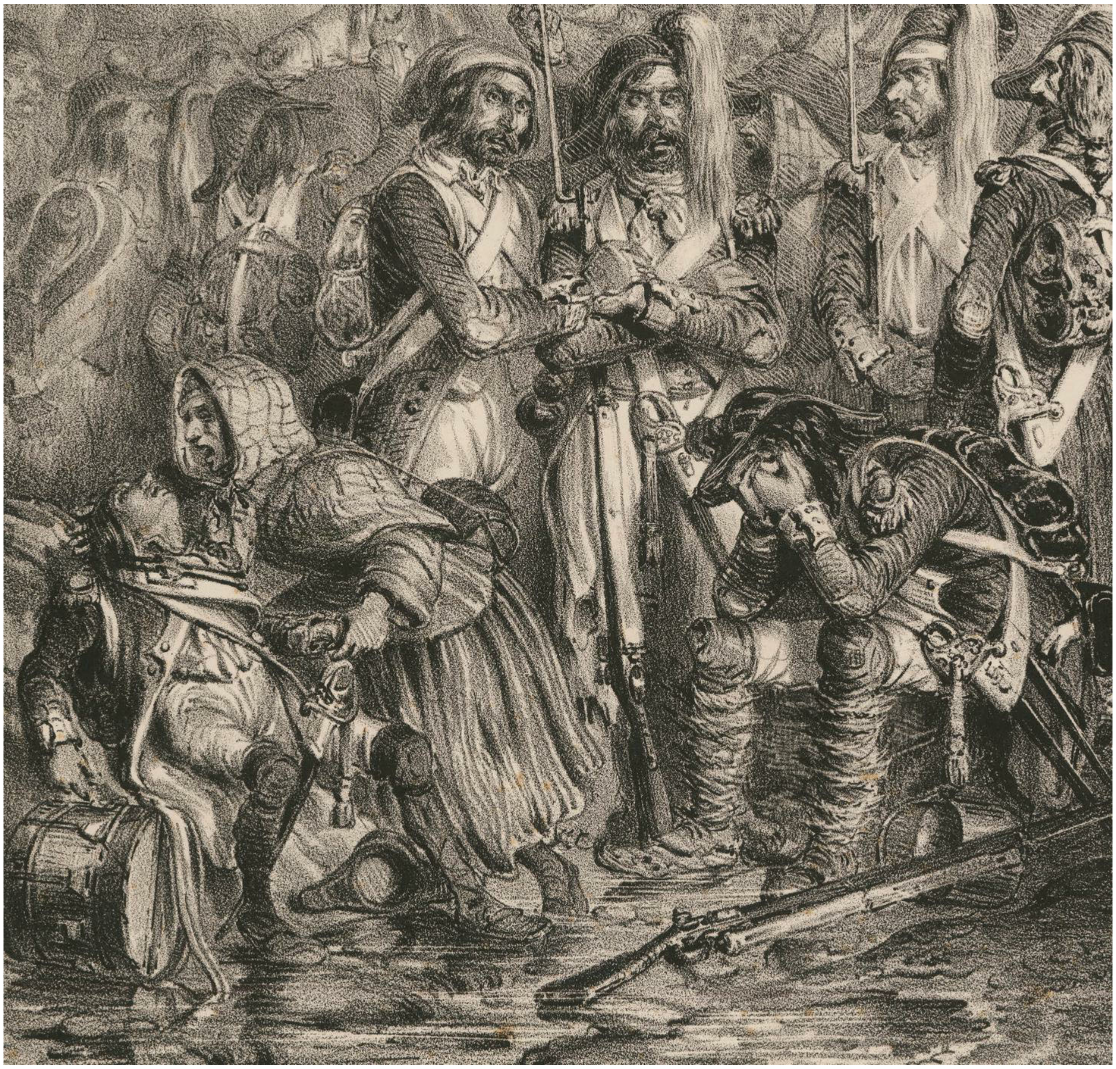
By including children in this study, we can better understand the regimental ‘family’. We have our four wives per battalion, assisted by their female children when old enough (perhaps from the age of seven). We then have anything from 12 to 18 boys in service (depending on battalion organization), learning to be soldiers, musicians and artificers. The cohesion of the regimental family was described by an anonymous *vivandière* to Gassicourt, a participant in the 1809 campaign. Speaking of her children, she said:

> These brats, made at bivouacs and baptized under our eagle, will one day, I hope, be good grenadiers. … There is not one [man] in the regiment who does not act like the father of my children, they are so used to seeing them, cuddling them! In the halts, they play with them. When it is necessary to line up in front of the enemy, I remain in the rearguard, and I put our little family under cover… If I die, the regiment will take care of my children, will not lose sight of them, and they will hear nothing but good about their mother.

THE LEGEND OF MARIE TÊTE-DU-BOIS

We know the stories of very few *cantinières* of the Napoleonic period. No formal registers of women were sent to the Ministry of War, so only a handful of women appear in the archives at the Château de Vincennes, compared with the thousands of soldiers whose names survive in regimental rolls. However, the story of one *cantinière* was published in 1833, in the *Souvenirs* of the former officer turned journalist and playwright Louis Gabriel Montigny (1784–1846). We cannot know if the subject was a real woman or simply a literary invention, and we are well aware that, under scrutiny, the account has as many holes as the proverbial Swiss cheese. Hence it is repeated here not as factual history, but as a 'legend'; even if it is a fictional representation or caricature of the sutler-women in Napoleon's army, the fact that it was written by a veteran nevertheless lends it interest.

Montigny tells us that Marie received her nickname Tête-du-Bois ('wooden head') because her face looked like a wigmaker's wooden mannequin head, with a shortened nose and an enlarged mouth. Gentlefolk may have looked down on her with pity, or held their noses at her approach: she reeked of brandy, garlic and pipe tobacco, and when she spoke her vocabulary was that of a foul-mouthed dragoon. Marie was not one of those 'little mistresses' with a horse and covered cart, who sheltered from the elements and regularly changed their linen and dresses. She went on foot like an infantryman on the march, whatever the weather, wearing a soldier's gaiters and dusty shoes.

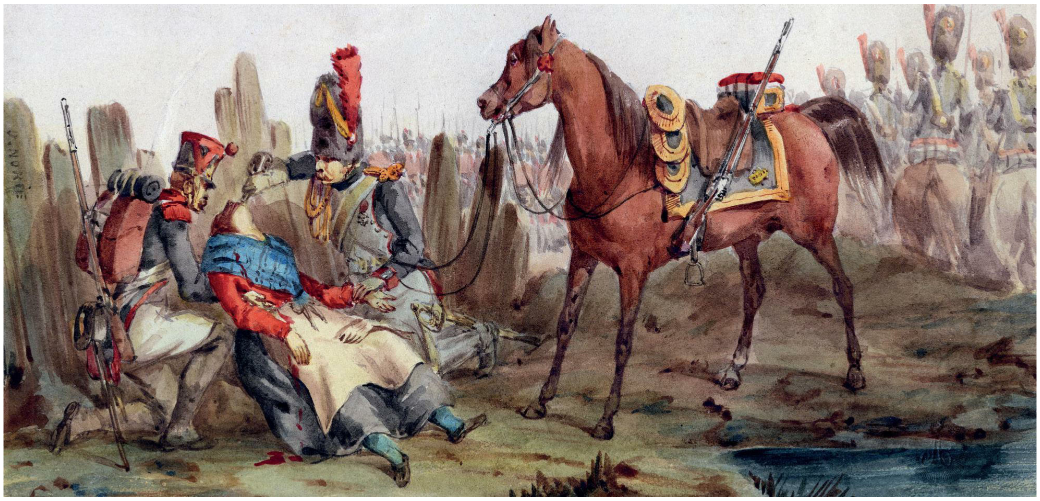


Detail from an 1840 work by Clément Pruche: at left, a grief-stricken *cantinière* tries to comfort a mortally wounded drummer – presumably her son? The standing grenadiers seem impassive, but the man on the right, sobbing with his head in his hands, may be the drummer's father. (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection)

Even by the questionable standards of the day, Marie did not practise good hygiene. She had a single small glass with which to serve out her brandy. If a customer complained that the glass was dirty, she would simply plunge four fingers in and rotate it against her thumb. What Marie lacked in finesse, however, she made up for in courage. Montigny writes that she was devoted to France, and did not follow her regiment so much as lead it. She was always seen at its head, marching from country to country. On the day of battle she was always at the most perilous post. She had seen action at least 20 times, but the enemy bullets never touched her.

Marie was born in about 1765 at the Hôtel des Invalides, where army pensioners lived; her father was a blind veteran, and her mother a laundress. Marie grew up caring for her father, but had too adventurous a spirit to remain cooped up in a hospital full of old men. She found herself following a Light Infantry half-brigade in the Army of the Sambre-et-Meuse, under the protection of a drummer who claimed to have once marched with the *Gardes Françaises* . The two were unmarried; in fact Marie married only once, in 1805, to a grenadier who had eyes mainly for her brandy barrel. He was a brave fellow, courageous before the enemy and equally ferocious among his comrades, but with Marie he became sweet as an angel. He was her best customer, and had no ambitions in life beyond drinking himself silly whenever Marie allowed it. She did not take his name after the wedding: quite the reverse – the husband became known to his comrades as 'Monsieur Marie'. They had a son, who must have been born in the Sambre-et-Meuse days (not at Marengo, as Montigny claimed, careless of arithmetic). From an *enfant de troupe* he rose to be promoted sub-lieutenant at 20 years old. When Marie's business was slow, he would pass his wages to his beloved mother so that she could buy more brandy.

The end of the First Empire brought tragedy: Marie's husband the grenadier was killed at Montmirail (11 February 1814), and a few weeks later her son was cut in two by a cannonball beneath the walls of Paris. Marie was on the Montmartre Heights when news of his death reached her. She went to the place he had fallen, found and collected his remains, and carried them on her shoulders in search of a church to bury him. On the way she was struck in the posterior by a ball, and fell. Some soldiers dragged her to a nearby ambulance, and she survived, though bearing a scar (which she was not ashamed to show off).



'Death of a vivandière', by the British military artist Orlando Norie (1832–1901). A Horse Grenadier has dismounted to give a drink to a dying camp follower. *Cantinières* who followed their regiments onto the battlefield did so at enormous personal risk; even when sheltering behind the formations they could be struck at random by artillery fire. (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection)

With the emperor exiled to Elba, and with her parents dead long since, Marie found herself a childless widow without resources. She took work as a laundress near a barracks; she had been used to say that she would never demean herself to touch a shirt in which a soldier was not wrapped, but needs must, and it had been her mother's profession before her. When the emperor returned in the spring of 1815, Marie sold her irons, girded on a keg again, and set off for Lille, where she found a general of the Old Guard once of her acquaintance. She acquired a *cantinière's* patent, and was attached to the Guard, where she received a dignified welcome. On the eve of what was to prove her seventeenth and final campaign, she was 50 years of age.

As was her habit, she did not hang back with the wagon train. At Fleurus (Ligny), in the middle of the mêlée, she was overthrown and trampled underfoot by a squadron of Prussian dragoons. On the morning of 18 June she was with the Guard at Waterloo. She had a foreboding sense of defeat, and quietly said as much to some of the older soldiers – not the young ones, who might be panicked. In the afternoon she fatalistically went to take a final look at Napoleon, and afterwards thought only of getting herself killed. If the emperor was defeated, there would be nothing left for her but a lonely life as an ageing and destitute washerwoman.

In the evening, Montigny says that Marie was in the middle of one of the squares of Guardsmen, freely handing out drinks and consolation to the wounded too numerous to carry away. When the cry of ‘ *Sauve qui peut!* ’ (‘Save yourselves!’) went up, Marie stayed in the square. A canister ball struck her in the side, passing through both her brandy barrel and her body. Mortally wounded, she dragged herself to the body of an apparently dead grenadier, wanting to use it as a pillow. As she crawled along a stray cannonball bounced between the ranks of soldiers and struck her in the face, disfiguring her. When she cried ‘ *Vive l’Empereur* !’, the supposedly dead grenadier roused up and looked at her. Montigny imagines their brief final exchange as follows:

‘Marie, you’re not so pretty like that.’

‘That is possible,’ Marie replied; ‘but I can boast of being the daughter, wife, mother and widow of soldiers!’ And with that she, and Napoleonic France, finally expired.

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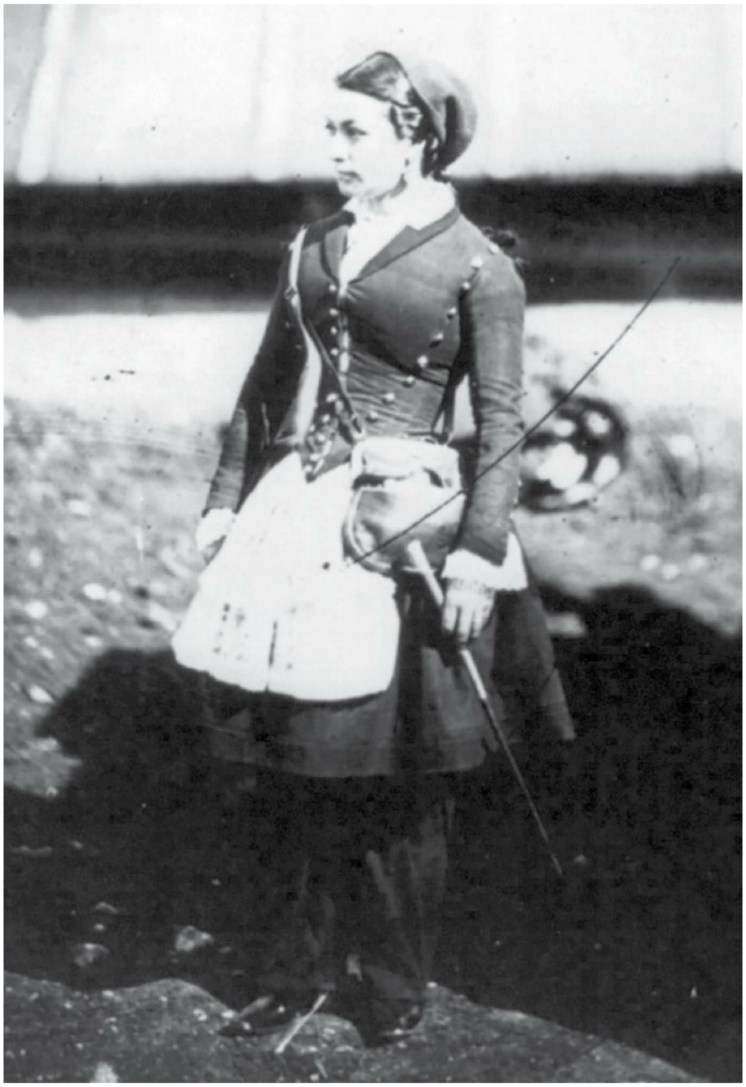
There are precious few studies of this interesting subject. The monumental 17-volume *Dictionnaire de l'armée de terre* by Bardin offers a thought-provoking starting point for research. The military statutes are in Berriat's 4-volume compilation, and in Bardin's *Mémorial de l'officier d'infanterie* . Old editions of the French publication *Carnet de la Sabretache* are online, not to mention many Napoleonic French memoirs (visit ***gallica.bnf.fr***). The memoirs of Blaze are an entertaining read, particularly the original two-volume French edition. English readers should begin with Cardoza's *Intrepid Women,* and Lynn's *Women, Armies …* is also useful for a broader context. For contemporary fashion, Barreto & Lancaster's *Napoleon and the Empire of Fashion* is essential. Below is a selection of the works used in this book.



Photograph by Roger Fenton (1819–69) of a French *cantinière* in 1855, wearing Zouave regimental dress – the kind of Second Empire image that misled later artists into representing Revolutionary and First Empire camp followers in quasi-military costume. Note the lower waistline, shorter skirt, and the 'hour-glass' shape created by heavily boned corsetry. (Library of Congress)

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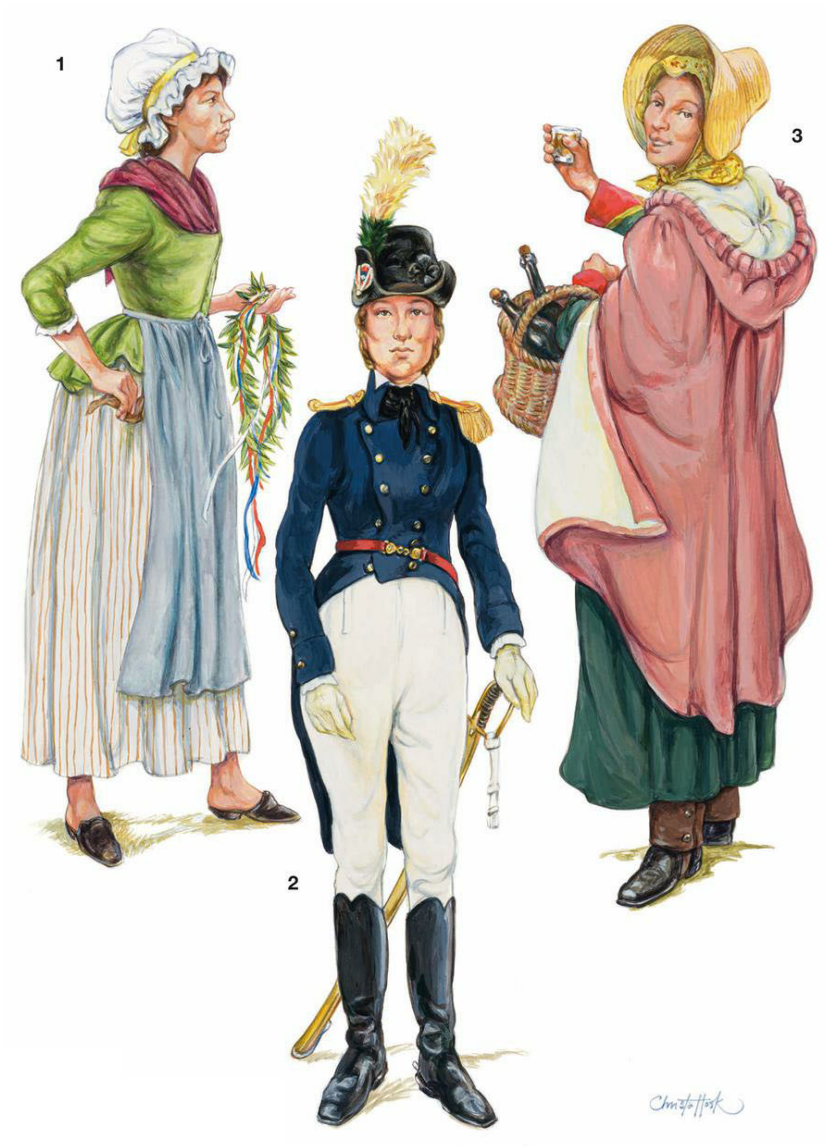
PLATE COMMENTARIES



1: National Guard volunteer’s wife, 1790
2: Félicité Fernig, 1792
3: Light cavalry *vivandière,* 1792

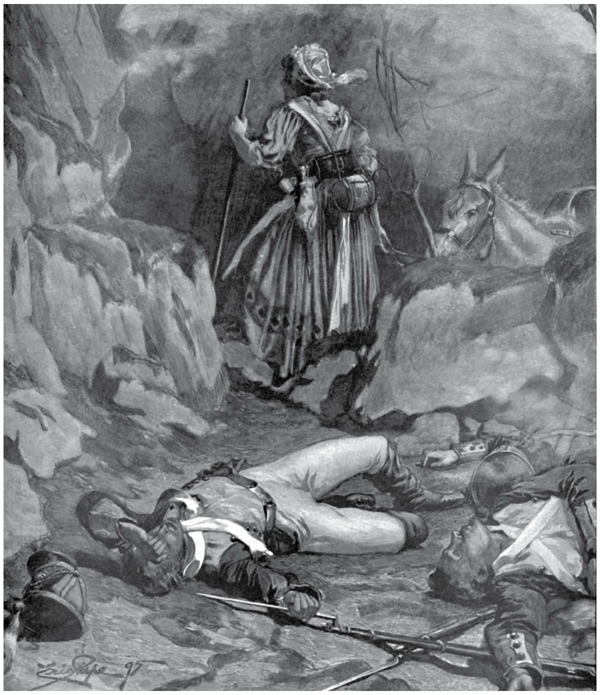
A: EARLY 1790s

A1: National Guard volunteer’s wife, 1790

The inspiration for this figure is a series of illustrations by Etienne Béricourt showing early scenes from the Revolution, of which one shows the works taking place on the Champ de Mars, Paris, in preparation for the 1790 Fête de la Fédération. Women are seen preparing food and drink, while others mingle with members of the National Guard; this is not surprising, because National Guardsmen were often bourgeois supporters of the Revolution, some of whom would have been married men with families. In this typical civilian costume of the Revolutionary period the distinctive shape around the hips is caused by wearing a ‘bustle’, a cloth roll worn around the waist over or under the petticoat. Wreathes garnished with patriotic colours were often hung from the ridge pole of canteen tents.

A2: Félicité Fernig, 1792

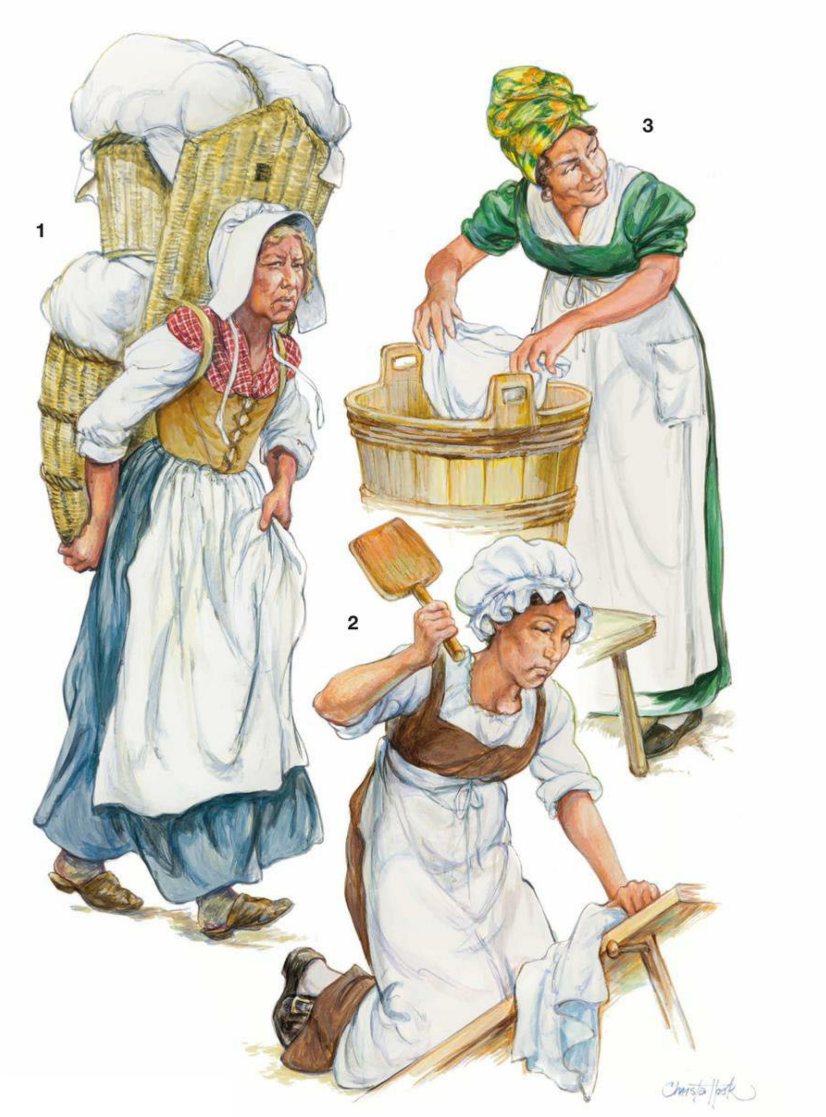
Carle Vernet’s depiction of the battle of Jemappes shows a woman aide-de-camp on Gen Dumouriez’s staff. Félicité (1770–1841) and Théophile (1775–1819) Fernig were sisters serving in the National Guard of Mortagne. When they distinguished themselves in action Dumouriez gave them commissions as staff officers and took them as ADCs, in which role they fought at Valmy, Jemappes, Anderlecht and Neerwinden. After Dumouriez’s defection to the Austrians in 1793 the Fernig sisters, though innocent, were judged guilty by association, and remained in exile until 1802. The uniform depicted by Vernet borrows elements from the light cavalry, including the style of sword belt. The bicorn hat has a flat top rather than the more common rounded style. Note the tricolour cockade, worn because she was actually serving as a soldier.



Engraving after Eric Pape, c. 1896, depicting an episode at the battle of Busaco in Portugal, 27 September 1810. The memoirs of Marbot recount that when Gen de Bde Édouard-François Simon of Loison’s Division was wounded and left in an exposed position, a rescue attempt was driven back by British fire. Trusting that the British would not fire at a woman, a *cantinière* from the 26th Line went out; unable to lift him, she recovered the general’s belongings for safe-keeping. As she led her donkey up the rocky slopes between the two lines of skirmishers, the British ceased fire until she had passed; Gen Simon was subsequently saved and taken into captivity. (The Print Collector/Getty Images)

A3: Light cavalry *vivandière* , 1792

Vernet’s painting of Jemappes also shows a *vivandière* offering a glass of brandy to a mounted hussar. Rather than a brandy barrel, she carries bottles in a wicker basket. This *vivandière* is wearing overalls beneath her skirt. In light cavalry fashion, these appear to be finished with leather trim, buttons down the out-seams, and a shoe-securing *sous-pied* strap under the arch of the foot.



See commentary text for details.

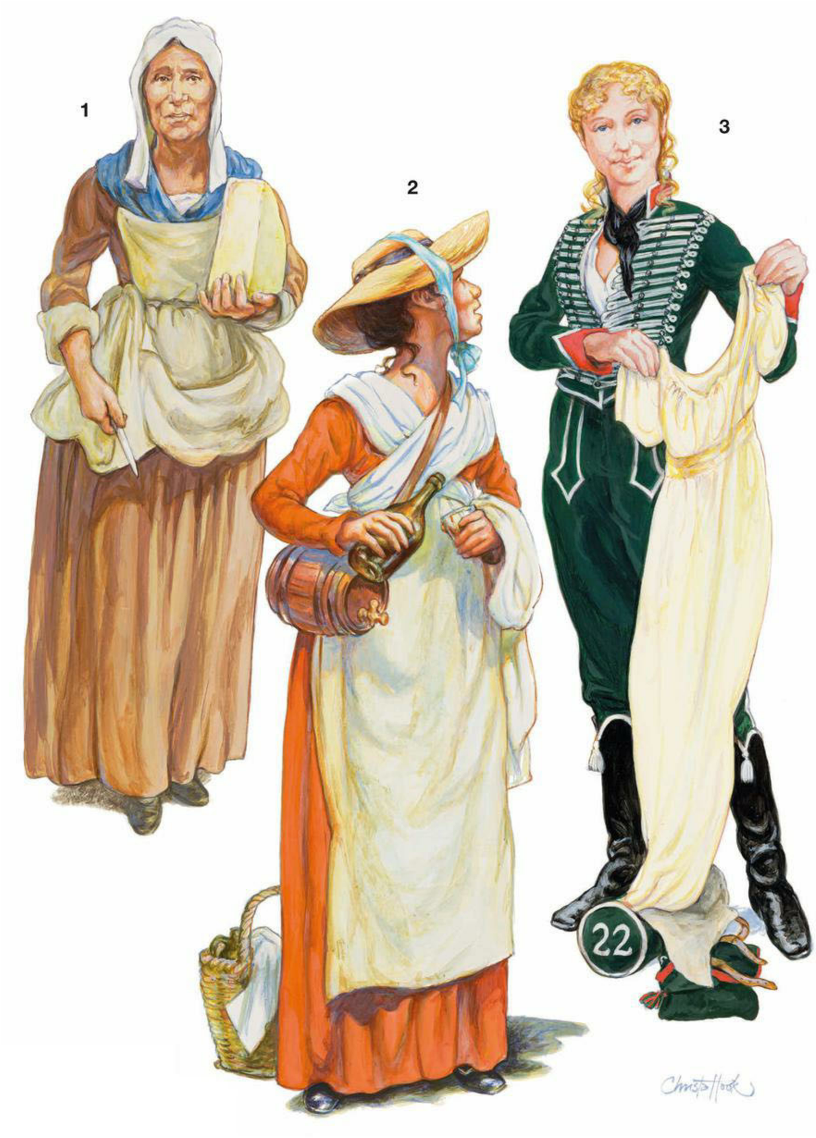
B: LAUNDRESSES

Typical working-class civilian clothing of the period had to be practical to allow physical activity, including heavy lifting, bending and kneeling. At the beginning of the period we usually find women with apron, skirt, and a linen 'stay' (often covered by a jacket), plus a linen bonnet.

B1 *:* Many depictions of laundresses show them carrying laundry panniers stacked onto a frame.

B2 *:* The figure with the wooden paddle represents clothing worn by working women in the early years of Napoleon's reign.

B3 *:* At the end of the First Empire, we see working women still wearing the high waistline, with the apron tied high and occasionally with integral pockets. By 1814 we often see hair tied up in a 'Madras' scarf in the 'Creole' style. This fashion copied the *tignon* worn in colonial Louisiana, where under Spanish administration Creole women of African descent had been required to wear the scarf to distinguish them from European women. The scarves were wrapped so stylishly that European women imitated the fashion.



1: *Vivandière* , Army of Italy, 1796
2: *Cantinière* , Egypt, 1798
3: Pauline Fourès, Cairo, 1798

C: ITALY & EGYPT, 1796–98

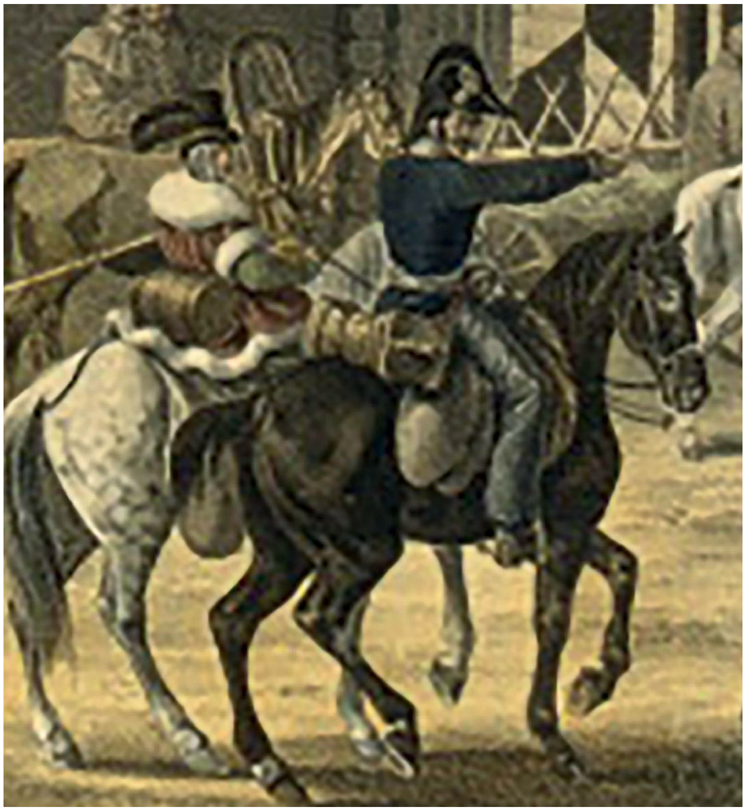
C1: *Vivandière* , Army of Italy, 1796

This *vivandière* is inspired by a figure in Bacler D'Albe's painting 'The Battle of the Bridge of Arcola'. The new fashions from Paris have yet to reach women in the army in Italy, who are dressed very much the same as at the beginning of the decade, in simple peasant working clothes. This apron appears to have a bib front worn over the blue *fichu* , and, as in many depictions, the bottom is gathered up and forms something like a pouch. One interesting feature of the painting is that it shows the *vivandière* selling cuts from cured hams and a wedge of hard cheese. Army rations

– when available – never included delicacies such as these; according to Blaze, a well-stocked *vivandière* would have saveloys, other types of sausage, and cheese among her wares.

C2: *Cantinière* , Army of the Orient; Egypt, 1798

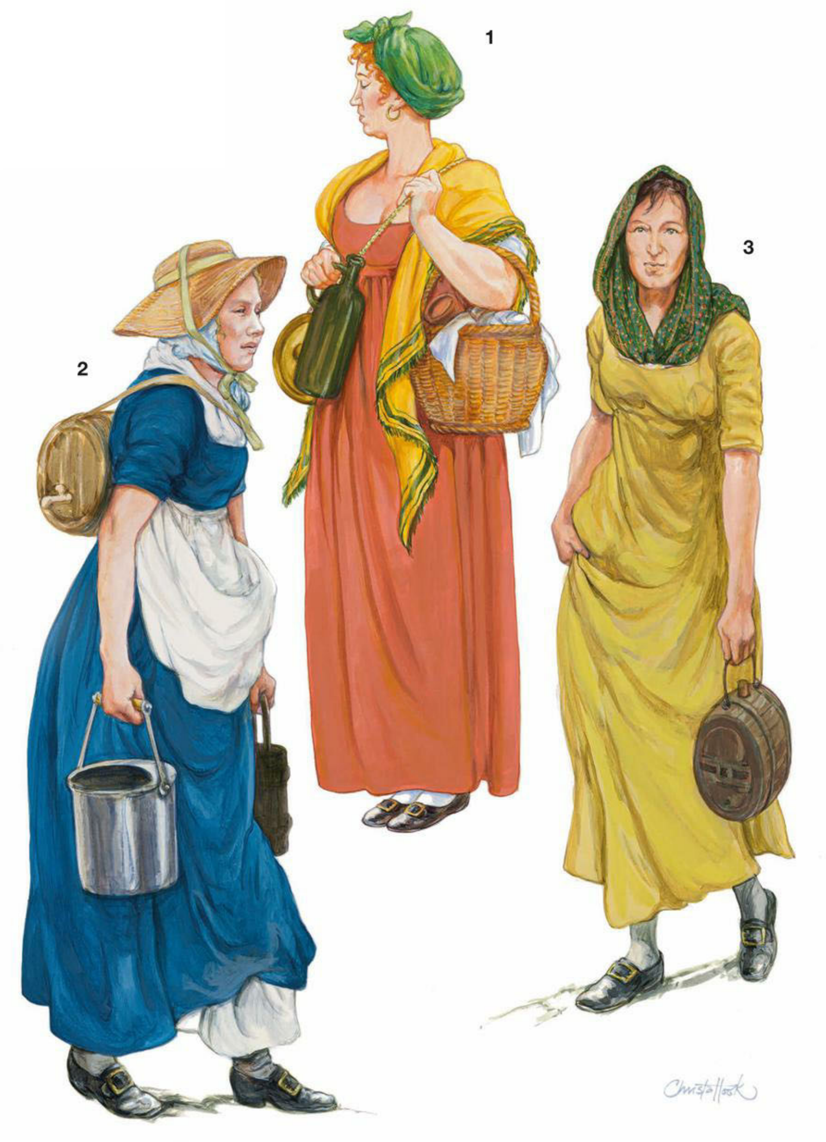
This figure is based on a *cantinière* depicted in Lejeune's 'Battle of the Pyramids'. In the original painting the *cantinière* is embraced by an amorous dragoon, even while she serves brandy to some drummers taking shelter in a square while under attack by Mameluke cavalry. Although he served in the 1790s, Lejeune did not take part in the Egyptian expedition himself. This painting was first exhibited in 1806, so the costume is possibly influenced by early First Empire styles. Note that the ends of the *fichu* are crossed, passed behind the waist, and tied at the back. The *cantinière* is shown carrying a brandy barrel on her saddle, as well as serving drinks from a bottle.



Detail from a work by Faber du Faur, showing (left, on dappled horse) a *cantinière* in the Württemberg contingent of the 1812 *Grande Armée* at Gzhatsk, 240km (150 miles) north-east of Smolensk. Note her feathered top hat worn over a patterned headscarf; the thickly lined pelisse; and the large keg carried behind her waist. (Fine Art Images/Heritage Images/Getty Images)

C3: Pauline Fourès, Cairo, 1798

Pauline Fourès (1778–1869) was nicknamed 'Cleopatra' by the soldiers after becoming Napoleon's mistress in Egypt. The wife of a lieutenant in the 22nd Chasseurs, Mme Fourès disguised herself as a chasseur during her clandestine voyage out, and adopted civilian clothes after arriving in Cairo. There she came to the attention of Napoleon, who sent her husband on a perilous mission to France via Malta and Italy while he took her as a lover (he had recently learned of Josephine's infidelity). Lieutenant Fourès survived; he returned unexpectedly, discovered the affair, and divorced his wife. After Napoleon returned to France in 1799, Pauline became mistress to his successor, Jean-Baptiste Kléber. She lived a long life, remarrying twice, and eventually making a fortune in the timber trade in Brazil. Pauline is imagined here in her military disguise, retrieving a civilian dress from a cloth portmanteau.



1: *Cantinière* , Consular Guard
2 & 3: Infantry *cantinières,* Army of the Reserve

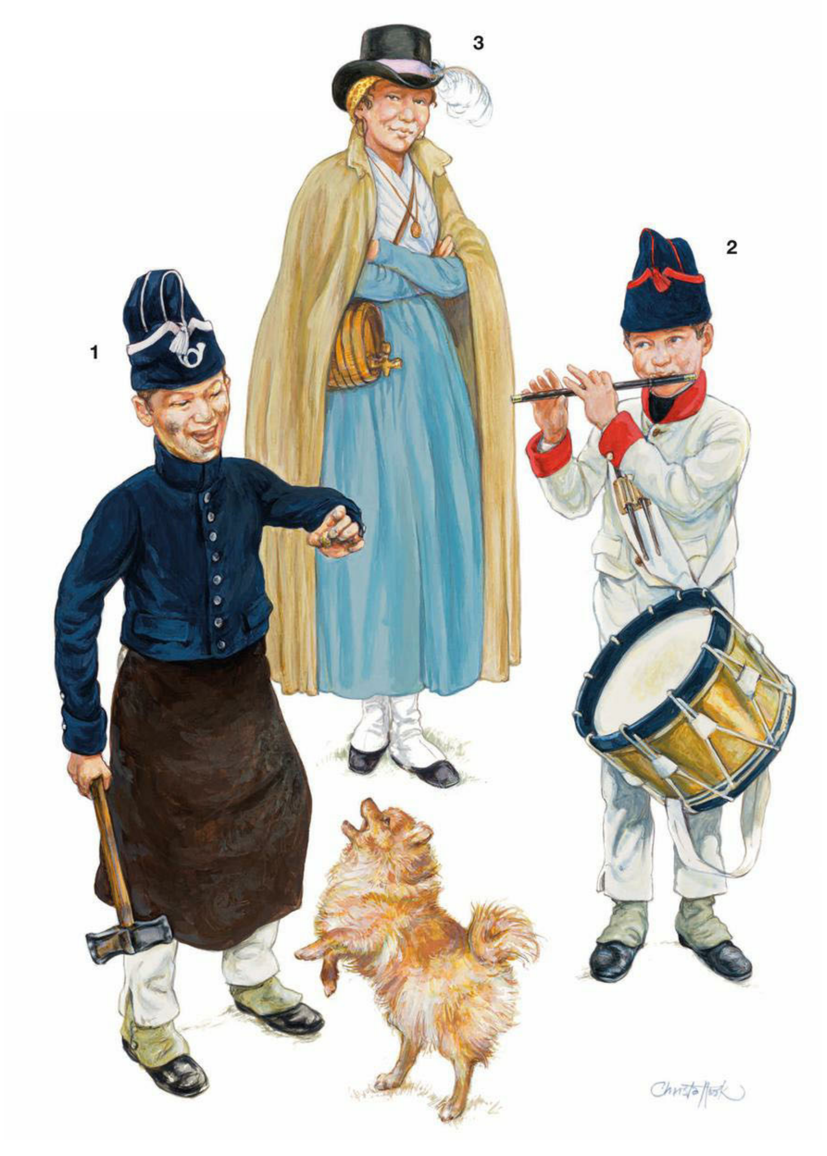
D: ITALY, 1800

D1 *Cantinière* , Consular Guard

This *cantinière* is depicted in the 1812 painting ‘Passage of the Army of the Reserve in the defile of Albaredo’ by Antoine Pierre Mongin (*c* .1761–1827). It depicts the woman in fashionable clothes – a *Directoire* style of dress (later called ‘Empire line’), with a shawl and a turban-style head covering. She has gold earrings – an expensive adornment, but a useful emergency cash reserve. In the painting she is seen kneeling beside sappers of the Guard and a dragoon. Her tonnelet of brandy is suspended on a metal chain.

D2 & D3: Infantry *cantinières* , Army of the Reserve

These figures are based on several *vivandières* depicted in 'Passage of the Great St Bernard' by Bacler d'Albe. Produced only 18 months after Marengo, the images are probably highly accurate. Figure D2 is depicted in the original walking with a small group of infantrymen; she has her *tonnelet* slung over her back, and carries what appears to be a cooking pot and a bucket. The other women are shown in dresses with a raised hemline – a nod towards practicality on campaign – with the *tonnelet* carried by a metal handle rather than slung.



1: Armourer's apprentice, Light Infantry
2: Trainee musician, Line Infantry
3: *Cantinière, Grande Armée* , Austria

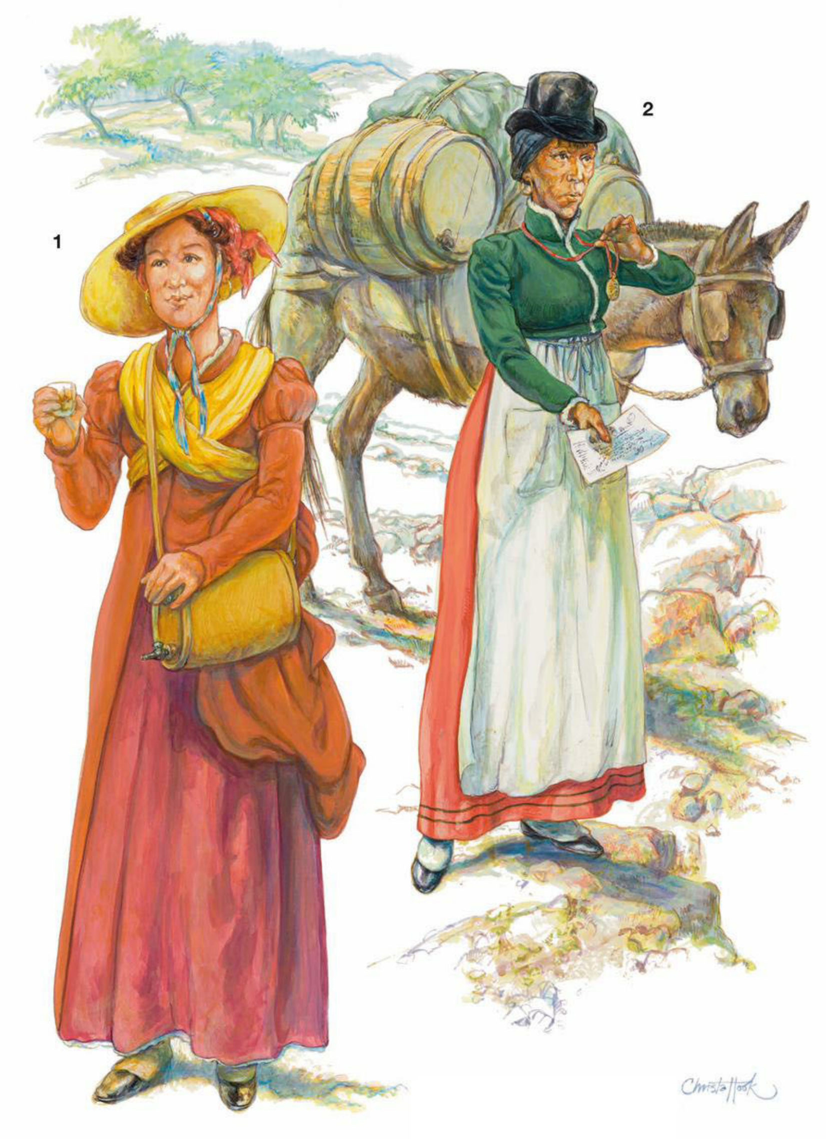
E: *ENFANTS DE TROUPE* , c. 1805

E1 & E2: Armourer’s apprentice & trainee musician

Both the boys’ uniforms are made from the off-cuts of cloth from uniform manufacture, and consist of woollen fatigue jackets and trousers with *bonnets de police* . The boy on the left is shown as an apprentice armourer in a Light Infantry regiment; he wears a brown leather apron and carries a hammer after working at the armourer’s forge. The other child is under training as a drummer and fifer in a Line Infantry regiment; those who became proficient might be chosen to go on campaign, on full pay, from the age of 14 years, while other *enfants de troupe* had to wait until they were 16.

E3: *Cantinière, Grande Armée* , Austria

This is the classic appearance of a cantinière during the early years of the First Empire (1805–09). Some are depicted wearing top hats, others straw bonnets, almost always with their hair gathered up in a scarf beneath the hat. Capes are commonly shown, along with long-sleeved gowns. Some depictions show the women wearing gaiters – a practical precaution for life on campaign, these were also quite common among civilians. Many camp followers are shown with babes-in-arms, and almost equally often they have pet dogs. In addition to companionship, these no doubt provided some warning by barking at would-be pilferers.



1: Catherine Baland
2: Catherine Sabatier, 9th Light Infantry

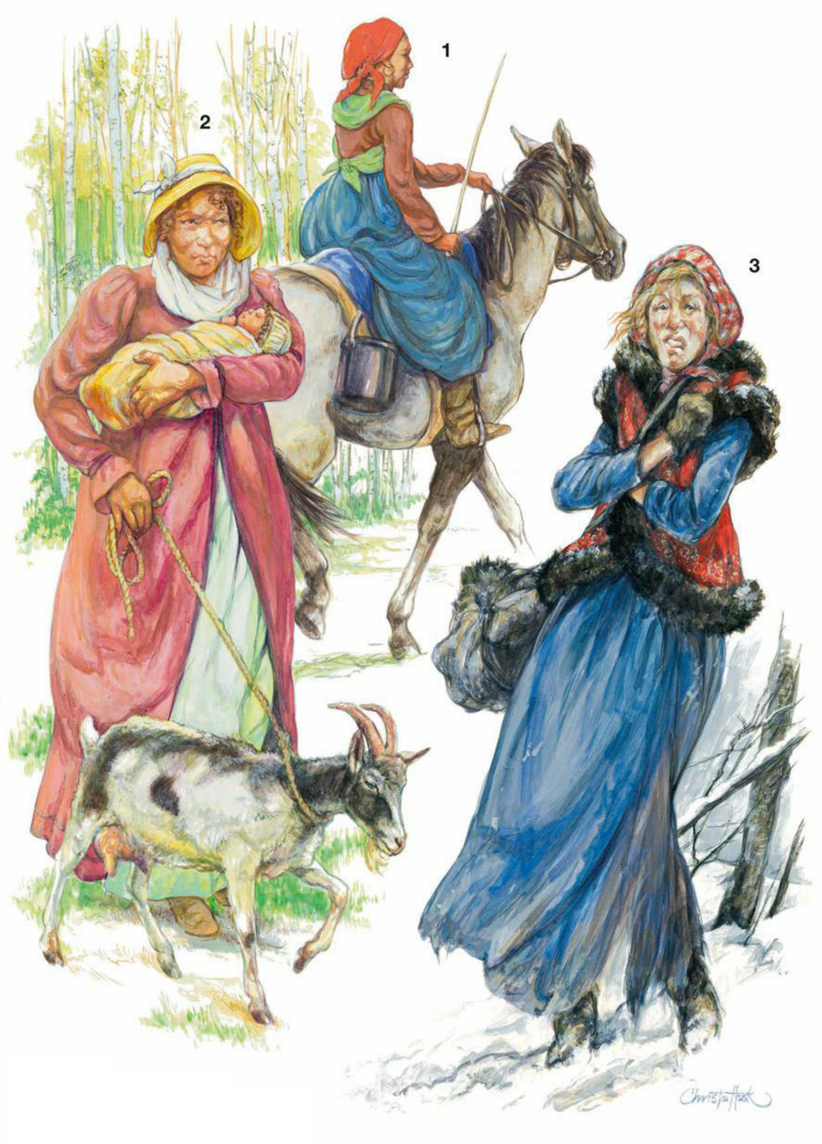
F: SPAIN, 1811

F1: Catherine Baland

One of the most striking depictions of a *vivandière* (*see* **here**) is in the 1811 battle of Chiclana (Barossa), as painted by the officer–artist Baron Louis-François Lejeune (1775–1848). The subject is wearing a *redingote,* with puffed detail on the upper part of the sleeves. This style is similar to a coat featured in the plates of the fashion publication *Costume Parisien* from 1807, and is described as a *capôte de lévantine* (a form of twill). Baland has her hair gathered up in a red scarf under a wide-brimmed hat, which is held in place by a ribbon, and she wears large bangle earrings. In Lejeune's painting she is also shown wearing linen gaiters.

F2: Catherine Sabatier, *cantinière* , 9th Light Infantry

Catherine Sabatier was born on 23 January 1767. She joined the 9th Light Infantry (originally the Chasseurs des Cévennes) Regt in 1784 – meaning that she probably married at 17. Her father was a serviceman killed at sea. Her first husband was killed after fathering two sons, who also enlisted in the regiment. After Catherine’s second husband was killed in action she was taken captive, and placed on the infamous prison hulks at Cadiz. She was released in 1814, returning to France destitute. While we do not have a description of her costume, which we reconstruct from various contemporary sources (including a Spencer jacket), we do know that she was 1.62m tall (approx 5ft 4ins), had brown hair, black eyes, a long nose and a pointed chin.



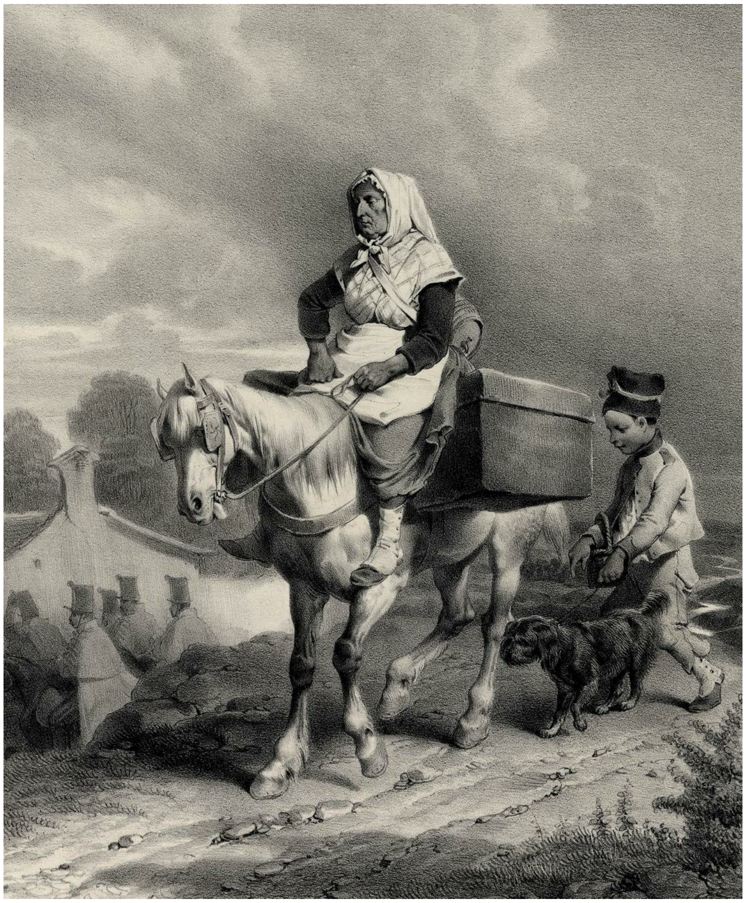
1: *Cantinière* , IV Corps, August
2: Bavarian *cantinière* , August
3: *Vivandière,* Berezina crossing, November

G: RUSSIA, 1812
G1 *Cantinière,* IV Corps, August

This figure is taken from Albrecht Adam's painting 'Soldiers on the road to Lianvawitschi, 14 August 1812'. The *cantinière* is shown riding (astride, not side-saddle – her boot can clearly be seen in the stirrup) behind a male sutler's wagon. The original sketch for this figure depicts her with a headscarf wound into a turban, but in the final version Adam gave her a scarf worn in the style of Central and Eastern Europe. In the original, the short Spencer-style jacket is more prominent, as shown here, above the knotted ends of the *fichu* . The long stick is not a riding crop, but is used for driving a pack mule seen alongside the figure in Adam's composition.

G2: Bavarian *cantinière,* August

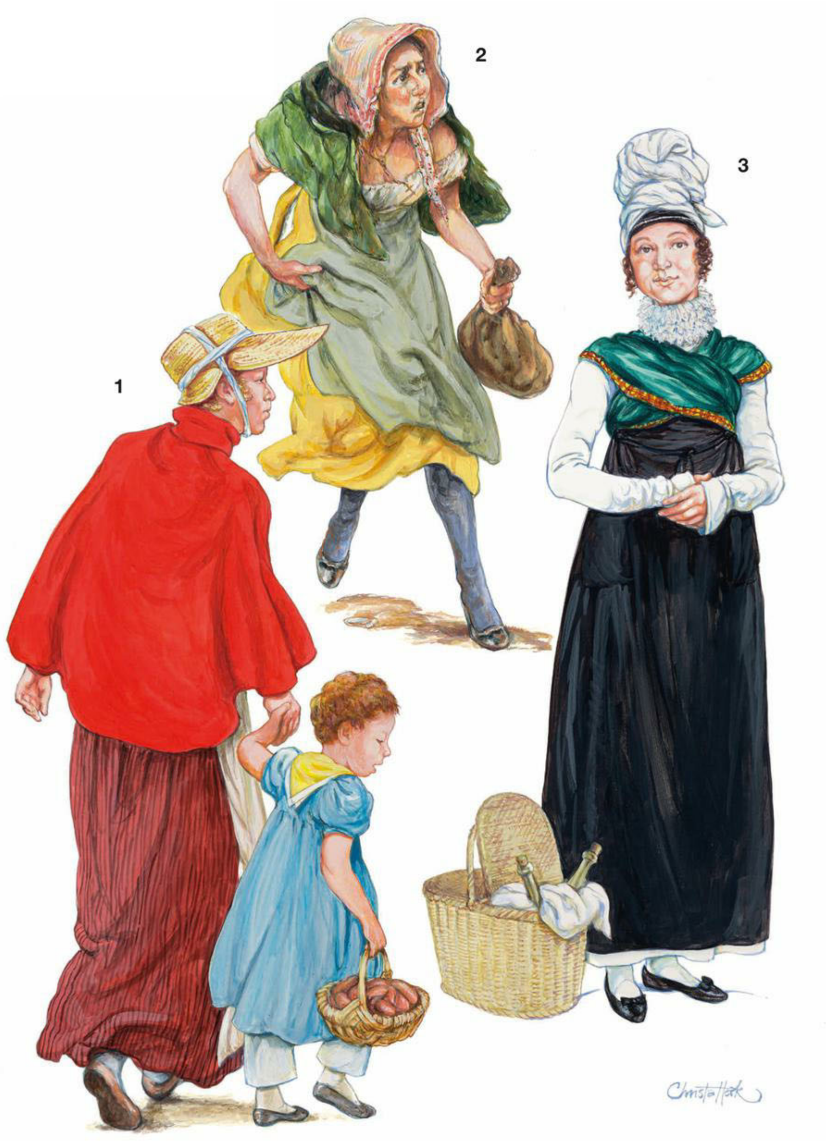
The *Grande Armée* of 1812 was a multinational force, and this also applied to the women camp followers. Taken from Adam's 'On the road of Wiazma, 20 August 1812' *,* this Bavarian woman was encountered by Prince Eugène. The weather was stifling hot, and the prince noticed the woman riding a heavily-laden horse, breastfeeding a baby. Eugène interviewed her and learned that the baby was just five weeks old and had been born on the road. Touched by her maternal tenderness, the prince gave her several gold coins. Goats are depicted in many images of camp followers – their milk is an excellent source of nutrition.



'Mother of the soldier', after Hippolyte Bellangé, dates from the mid-1820s, so only a decade after the subject. It depicts a *cantinière* riding a pack-horse loaded with two large cases, followed by a dog and a young boy wearing the typical costume of an *enfant de troupe* . Both mother and child wear gaitered shoes. (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection)

G3: *Vivandière* at the Berezina crossing, November

This *vivandière* is partly based on a second woman shown in Adam's 'Soldiers on the road to Lianvawitschi' and partly on Faber du Faur's 'Crossing of the Berezina, 28 November'. Napoleon's army was attacked while crossing the icy river; with such a mass of people queuing to cross a bridge, the effect of Russian artillery fire was indiscriminate and terrifying. Having survived the long march into Russia in hot summer, our *vivandière* has obtained a local fur-lined pelisse to help withstand the rigours of winter, and carries a fur blanket folded and slung.



1: *Cantinière* & child, Germany, 1813
2: Battle for Paris, 1814
3 *: Cantinière* , National Guard, 1815

H: THE FINAL YEARS, 1813–15

H1: *Cantinière* and child, Germany, 1813

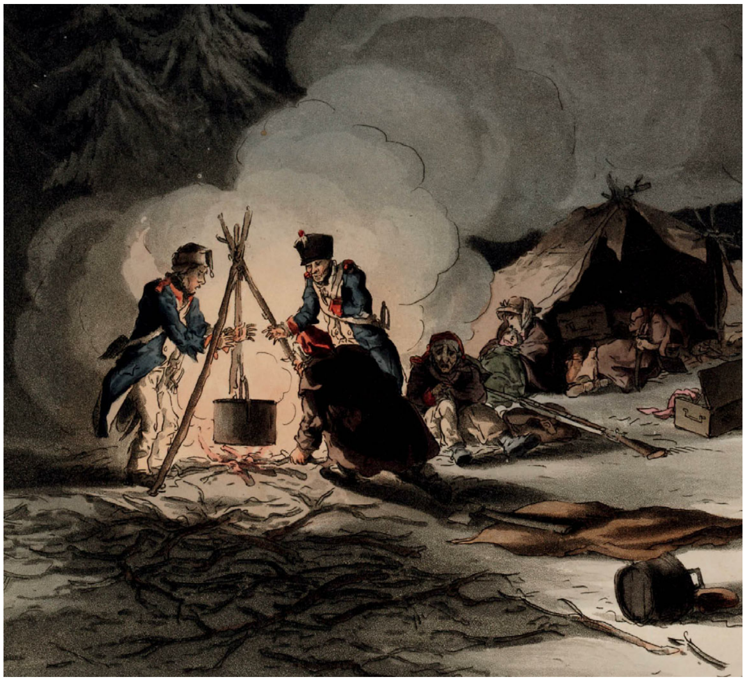
This *cantinière,* visiting a French camp accompanied by her young daughter, is inspired by an illustration by Aleksander Zauerveid (see **here**). Additional details are taken from watercolours by the German artist Georg Emanuel Opiz, who depicted scenes from the Russian occupation of Paris in 1814. Zauerveid's *cantinière* has her back to us, but we can see the shape of her cape and her fashionable bonnet.

H2: Battle for Paris, 1814

This figure is inspired by two women depicted in paintings by Horace Vernet: 'The Clichy Gate' (1822), and 'Scene from the French Campaign of 1814' (1826). The first shows a bedraggled woman and child with her remaining belongings strewn about her while a battle rages in the background. In the second, a peasant woman is shown with her child and mortally wounded husband as their farm is burned by Russians. As Napoleon's empire collapsed and his army fell back on Paris, many women must have found themselves swept up in the retreat. One interesting point is the woman's wedding ring – something rarely seen in contemporary art. Richer women tended not to wear a wedding band, only an engagement ring; one woman is also shown wearing a crucifix on a chain.

H3: *Cantinière* , National Guard, 1815

There is a dearth of iconography accurately depicting the costume worn by women camp followers in 1815. After Napoleon's first abdication on 6 April 1814 the regiments returned to their depots. In the more settled environment of the barracks, *cantinières* had the chance to earn money, and thus re-clothe and re-equip themselves in the latest styles. The figure portrayed here is largely based on a *cantinière* of the Paris National Guard depicted by Louis-Marie Lanté in an 1823 book about the costume of working women in Paris. Many of the details match illustrations of Parisian women made by Optiz in 1814, including the black apron and a long-sleeved white gown. The wearing of frilly lace increased in popularity in the second half of the Empire.



Atmospheric impression of the retreat from Moscow, by the British artist James Atkinson (1780–1852). A cantinière is depicted to the right of the group around the cauldron, sitting outside the soldiers' makeshift tent with a babe-in-arms. The picture is dated c. 1813–14, so is contemporary with events. The plight of women camp followers on the retreat was clearly widely understood, even in Britain. See also **Plate G3** . (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

TERRY CROWDY is a British military history author specializing in the Napoleonic Wars and the history of espionage. He has written extensively on French Revolutionary and Napoleonic infantry, with a particular focus on daily life in barracks and on campaign. His works include a history of the 'Incomparable' 9th Light Infantry Regiment, and a study of the Battle of Marengo. He is a Fellow of the International Napoleonic Society and a Member of the Society of Authors.

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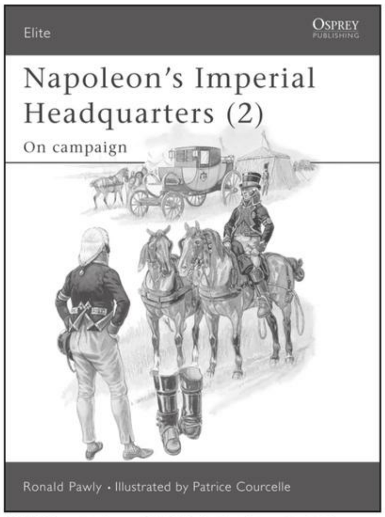
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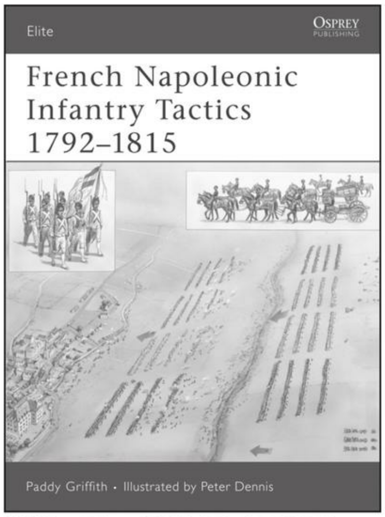
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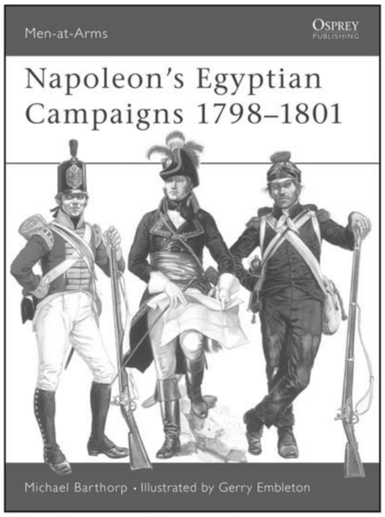
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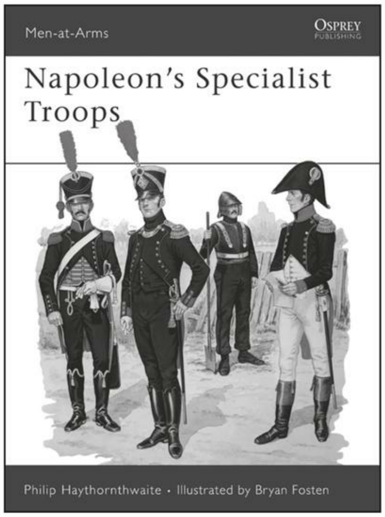
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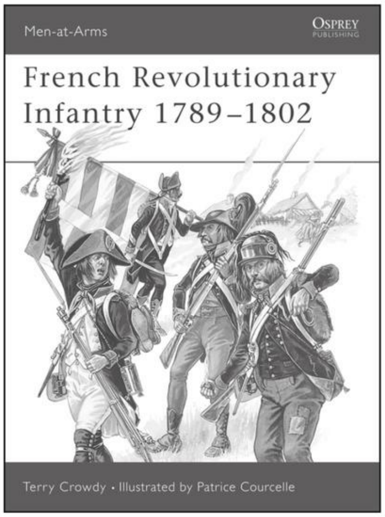
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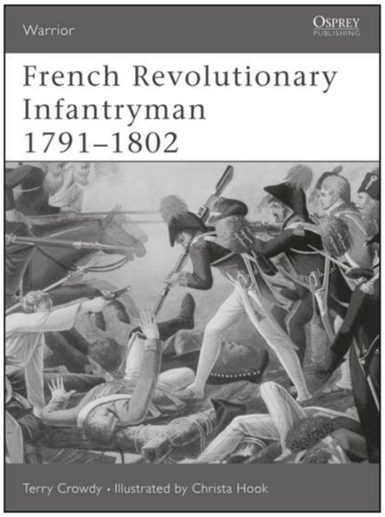
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